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NON BELIEVERS

EXPLORING
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ATHEISTS

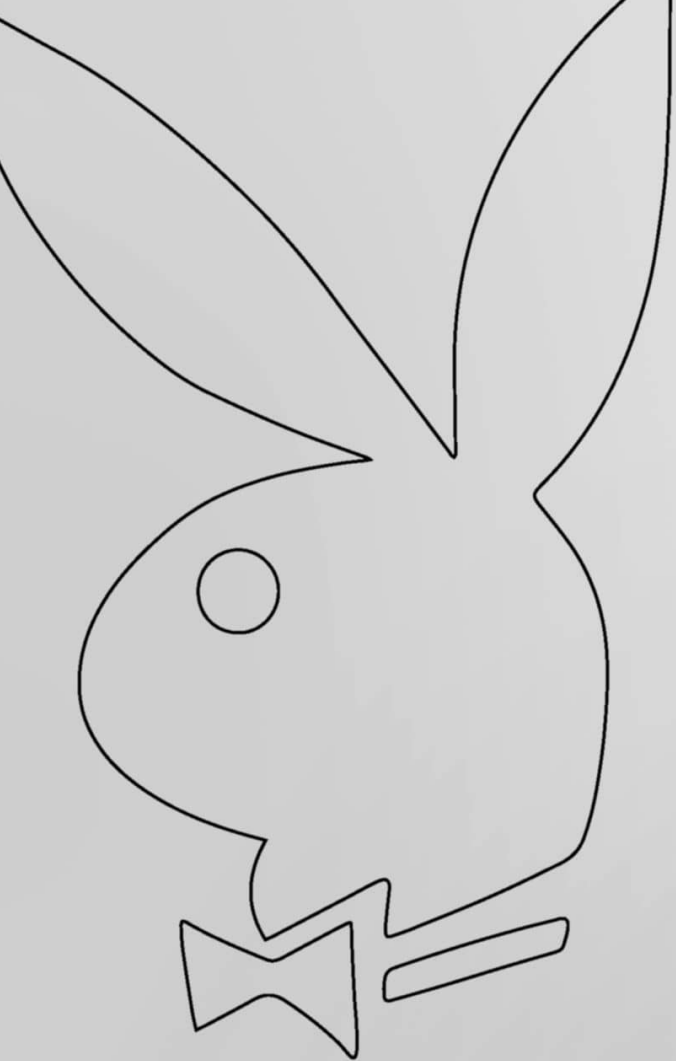
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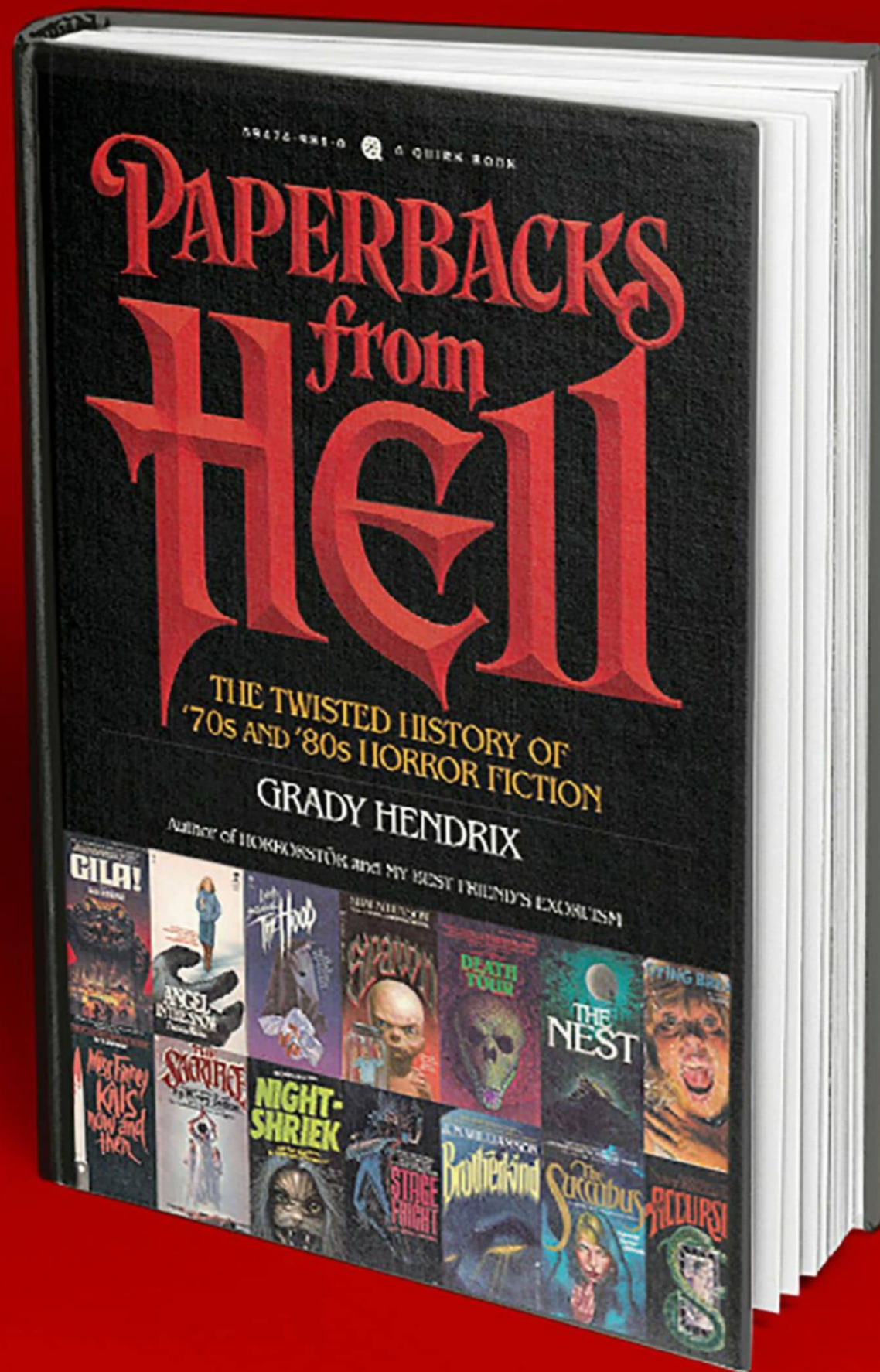
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A Glimpse Into Hell: Talking With Horror Historian Grady Hendrix

From abductor aliens to man-eating rabbits to evil Nazi leprachauns, you've got to check out this amazing horror guide

BY GIL MACIAS

PHOTO BY QUIRK BOOKS

Horror novel fans are in for a nostalgic treat when they pick up Paperbacks From Hell, a new book by Grady Hendrix that thoroughly examines the 1970s and 1980s explosion of horror fiction. An aficionado of the genre and author of novels *Horrorstör* and *My Best Friend's Exorcism*, Hendrix provides fascinating backstories for the era's delightfully twisted and often demented books. The many talented artists who helped make library and bookstore shelves far more eye-catching—with sexy, gruesome and sometimes hilarious cover illustrations—also get their due. Sure, the 1990s had R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series, but those kid-friendly books were child's play compared with the pulp-publishing madness that the 1970s and 1980s delivered. One particularly memorable paperback that Hendrix looks at is John Christopher's *The Little People*, which stars whip-swinging devilish Nazi leprechauns. Alien pregnancies, sex-crazed demons, man-eating animals and insects—you name it, the 1970s and 1980s horror section had it. Hendrix writes about it all in spectacular detail, accompanied by sensational imagery—Paperbacks From Hell includes hundreds of full-color covers and illustrations.

Some of these old horror-fiction gems were published by the now-defunct Playboy Press. In 1976, Hendrix writes, Playboy Press “began targeting female readers with horror novels and bodice rippers.” For an exclusive look at some of these old Playboy Press book covers, check out the 12 covers included below.

We caught up with Hendrix and talked to him about his favorite horror novel art, which books he'd like to see translated to film and why you should always judge a book by its cover.

PLAYBOY: There's that old saying, “Don't judge a book by its cover.” Do horror book covers from the 1970s and 1980s make it hard to follow that rule?

HENDRIX: “Don't judge a book by its cover” is supposed to apply only to serial killers—as in “We were getting married in three weeks and then the police dug up his backyard. Oh well, don't judge a book by its cover.” Books should 100 percent be judged by their covers, and the fact that this advice has been misapplied to books accounts for the drastic decline in the awesomeness of book covers since the early 1990s.

PLAYBOY: You describe H.W. Hoehnerman's *The Gilgul* as not living up to the promise of its cover. Out of all the books you include in *Paperbacks From Hell*, which has the best cover, but worst story?

HENDRIX: Whoa, whoa, whoa. The *Gilgul* cover features a one-of-a-kind sculpted screaming lizard-faced bride by artist Jim Thiesen—so unless the book inside was *The Great Gatsby*, there's no way anything could live up to it. And *The Gilgul* features said bride spraying black breast milk, so it has its own charms. Probably the one book that didn't deliver for me is *The Christmas Babies*, which promises evil Yuletide infants on the cover and then doesn't even take place at Christmas. Silent tears slid down my face while I read that one.

PLAYBOY: What's your favorite book-cover art of all time?

HENDRIX: You have to approach this from two directions. For sheer, jaw-dropping majesty, it doesn't get any better than illustrator Hector Garrido's Nazi leprechauns spilling out of an Irish castle on the cover of *The Little People*. For technical prowess, I'd have to go with Jeffrey Catherine Jones's

covers for *The Guardians* series, which are beautiful pieces that look like Frank Frazetta doing art nouveau.

PLAYBOY: Out of all the talented artists mentioned in the book, do you have a favorite?

HENDRIX: It's hard to pick, but there is no arguing the fact that William Teason should be considered one of America's great illustrators, yet the guy doesn't even have a Wikipedia page. And George Ziel's covers, cloaked in a suffocating Gothic miasma, are drop-dead gorgeous.

PLAYBOY: What horror book from the 1970s or 1980s would you like to see translated to the big screen?

HENDRIX: I really want to see Pixar tackle William W. Johnstone's *Toy Cemetery*. They did so well with the *Toy Story* movies that I feel like it would be just one small step for them to make *Toy Cemetery* and bring Johnstone's world of ghost-werewolf sex, clashing armies of insane toys, a town held hostage by heavy metal music and the bestial products of incest—and his unholy obsession with anal violation—to the big screen. I don't know about you, but that spells “summer blockbuster” to me.

PLAYBOY: VHS art from the 1980s has plenty of parallels to book art of the same time. Have you considered doing a book on VHS horror covers?

HENDRIX: I'd love to, but it's been done really well by Tom Hodge.

PLAYBOY: Your knowledge of horror fiction seems so compre-

hensive, it gives the impression that you live in a museum filled with hundreds of books and posters. Is that correct?

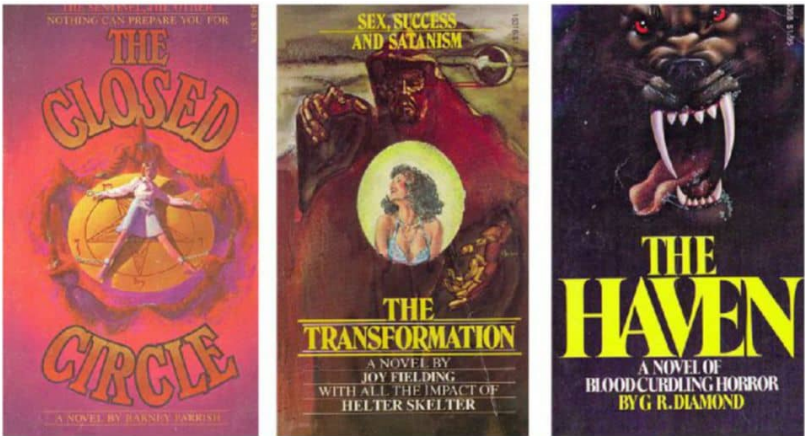
HENDRIX: If by “museum” you mean a tiny hovel bulging with moldering mass-market paperbacks that rise up over my head in tottering towers that threaten to crush me if I make the slightest misstep or any sudden moves, then yes. I live in a museum.

PLAYBOY: Is nostalgia for old horror tales partly responsible for the resurgence of 1980s-flavored pop culture creations such as *Stranger Things*?

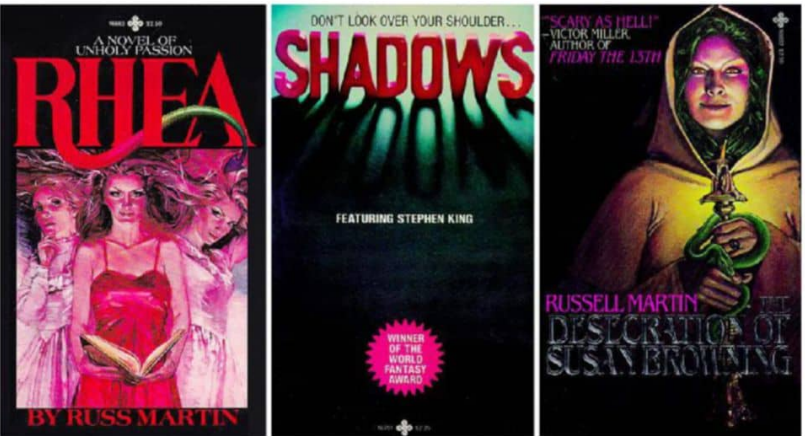
HENDRIX: Absolutely. These books leapt off drugstore racks and stabbed us in the brain at an early age, inspiring a generation of writers, and filmmakers, and graphic designers. These covers were our primal traumas and the stuff of our earliest nightmares. Pick a word—“influenced,” “haunted,” “scarred”—they did all that to us and more. And we loved it.

PLAYBOY: You've described illustrated covers like the ones featured in *Paperbacks From Hell* as part of a dying art. Are there any current artists you'd like to give a shout out to who are keeping this old-school style alive?

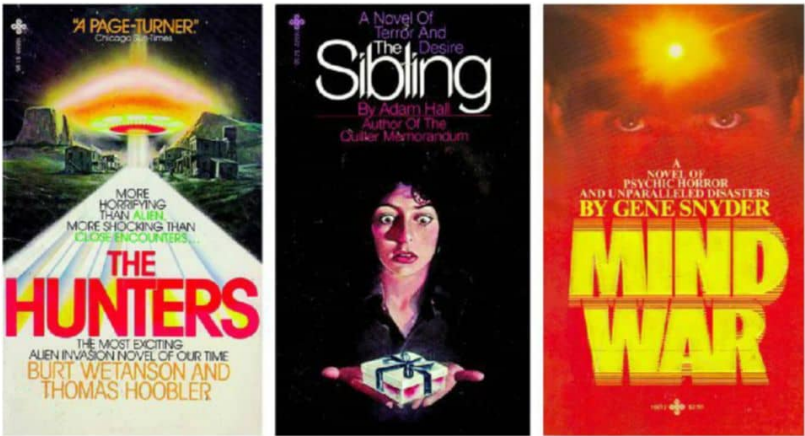
HENDRIX: A lot of the original artists are still working—Jill Bauman, Les Edwards, Lisa Falkenstern, Tom Hallman. The artists didn't go away, the books did. But there are also younger artists; Marc Schoenbach does poster art in this style, and it looks amazing. I'm not sure why he doesn't get more work.



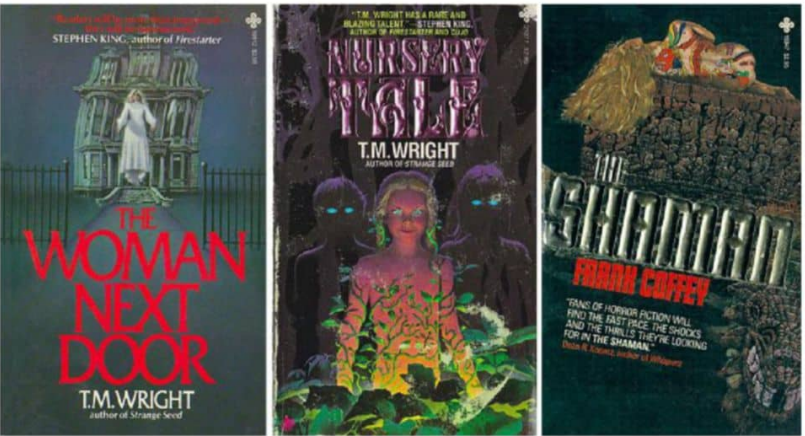
The Closed Circle, 1976; The Transformation, 1976; The Haven, 1976



Rhea, 1980; Shadows, 1980; The Desecration of Susan Browning, 1981



The Hunters, 1978; The Sibling, 1979; Mind War, 1979



The Woman Next Door, 1981; Nursery Tale, 1982; The Shaman, 1982



Whether he was photographing Marilyn Monroe wrapped seductively in bed sheets or Robert De Niro jamming hard on a sax, Douglas Kirkland has always had an eye for capturing his muses in their element

Last month, we spoke with photographer and former Playboy contributor Douglas Kirkland in the days leading up to his 50-year retrospective in Los Angeles, which featured iconic images of everyone from a sun-kissed Brigitte Bardot playing cards on a Mexico floor in 1965, to a toothy Jack Nicholson gripping his Oscar statuette in '75. The following collection includes a combination of photographs from Kirkland's recent show at Mouche Gallery, multiple shots from the then-27-year-old-photographer's famous night with Marilyn Monroe, who was featured on the 25th Anniversary of Look magazine in 1961, images from Kirkland's new book, Freeze Frame, and exclusive images of actress Margot Kidder, who Kirkland shot in 1975, from the Playboy Archive.

The Muses of Playboy Photographer Douglas Kirkland

INTRODUCTION BY **LIZ SUMAN**

PHOTOS BY **DOUGLAS KIRKLAND**



Swedish actress Ann-Margret rips through the Nevada desert in 1981



BAILEE *Barton*

Instagram @ItsBaileeBarton

Photography by High End Images | @highendimages
HMUA @lauraariaslua





Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! Talk to us about your career and what made you get into the industry? I've always been inspired by strong beautiful models as a little girl, I always knew I wanted to be a model. Finding the Playboy magazine when I was younger opened my eyes to another aspect of modeling, beautiful statuesque women.

What is at the top of your list to achieve the most this year? Really focusing on my mental health and well-being. A happy year is a healthy year. Crossing Playboy off my bucket list really helped in that aspect and boosted my confidence.

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? It's everything. That's the embodiment all women should carry and keep with them. I think that knowing that people think that of me is an absolute honor.

What would you say makes you stand out in the industry? I believe everybody and everybody is beautiful. But I represent women with natural bodies or women that don't ad-

here to the up-and-coming trends. I'd like to think I represent the woman with classic beauty but still have their own flair of uniqueness.

Where do you draw most of your strength from as a professional, career woman? Reminding myself why I'm doing what I'm doing regardless of what my path is. And reminding myself of what I don't want for myself and doing what I know I need to do in order to avoid that.

What are some of your biggest passions? Art and History. I love art, I've never been an artist but I love seeing it and using it as Inspiration. And History has a place in my heart. I think if I wasn't modeling I'd be teaching high school level History.

3 ultimate deal-breakers when it comes to men? If you're mean to those that work in the service industry, really if you're mean period but especially to those serving you. And if you're not funny, laughter is the key to my heart.

What are some of the things that attract you to a man? Again, a sense of humor. And a quick wit, I love ban-

ter and light debates. As far as in the physical sense- I'm a sucker for a nice smile and strong jaws.

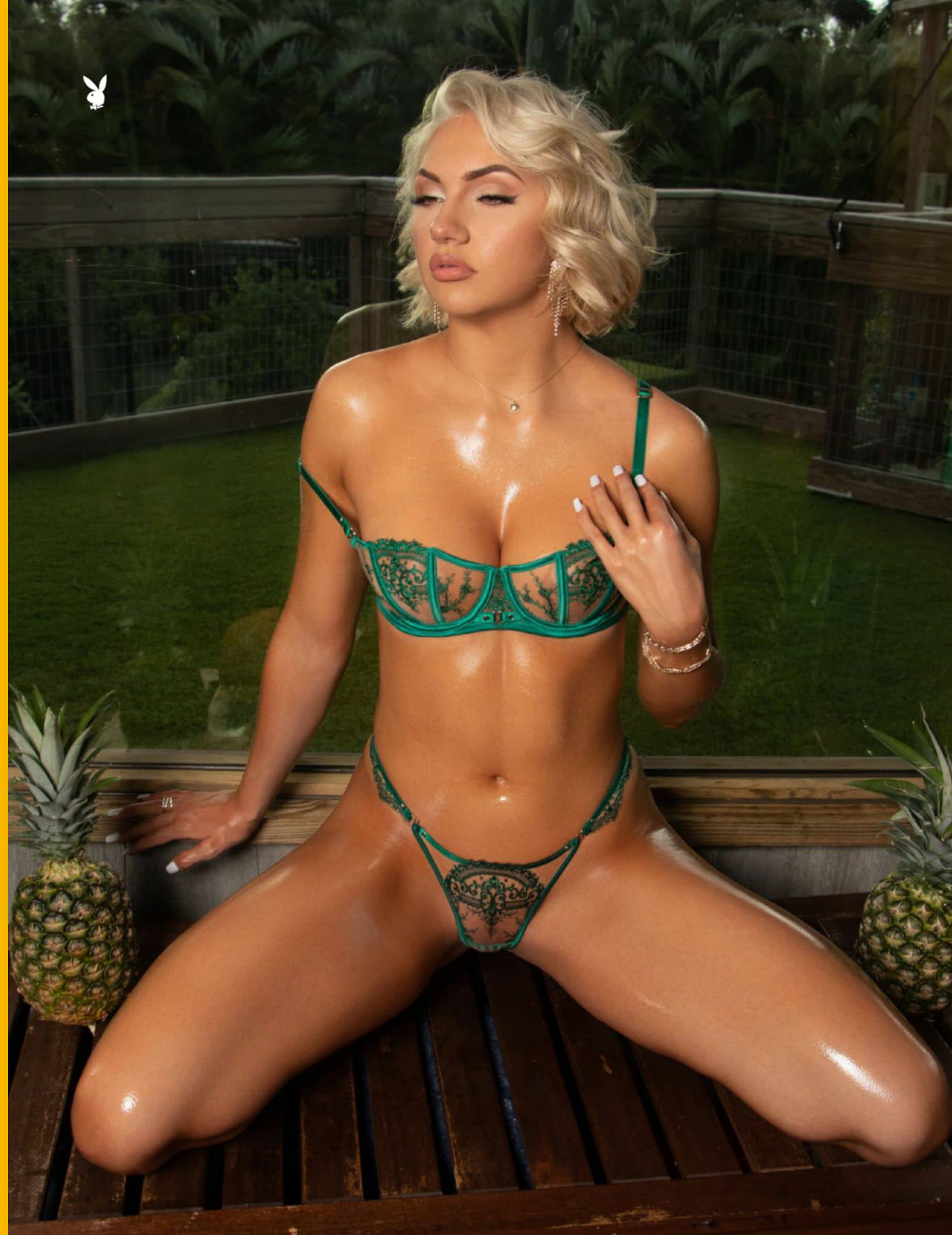
Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years? Baking pies in my house with probably 50 Dachshunds. Okay, maybe just 4.

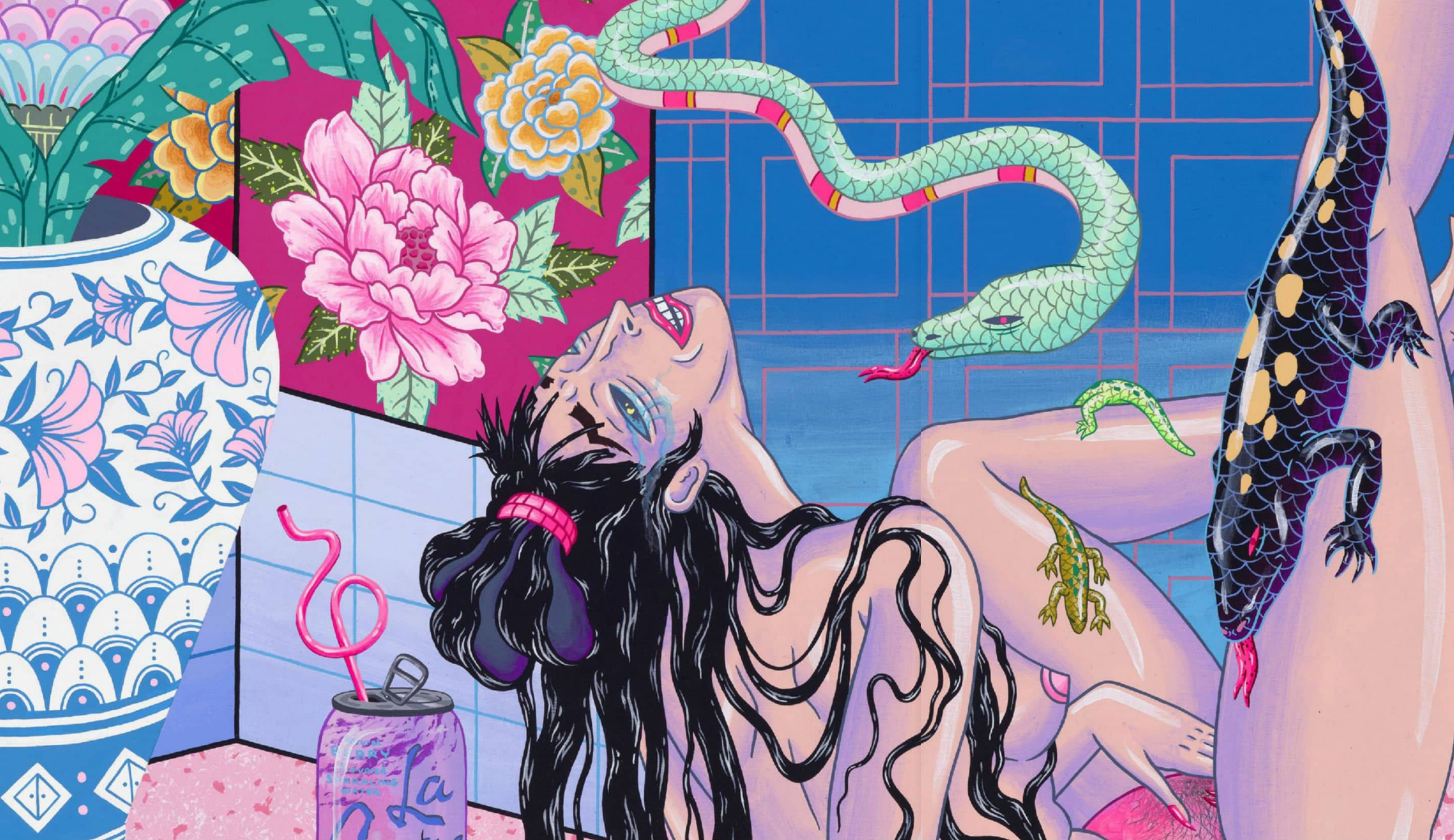
What is the wrong way to approach you as an admirer? Mistaking cocky for confidence. I love a confident man but trying to play up who you are and what you have is so yucky to me. Just be yourself, there is nothing more attractive than that. A corny pun never hurts either.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? Mostly on my social media, Twitter: @BaileeBumbleBee, TikTok: @ItsBaileeBarton and Instagram.

We are so happy to have gotten to know you a little bit! Any last words out there for our readers? Likewise!!, Can't wait for more to come in the future!!







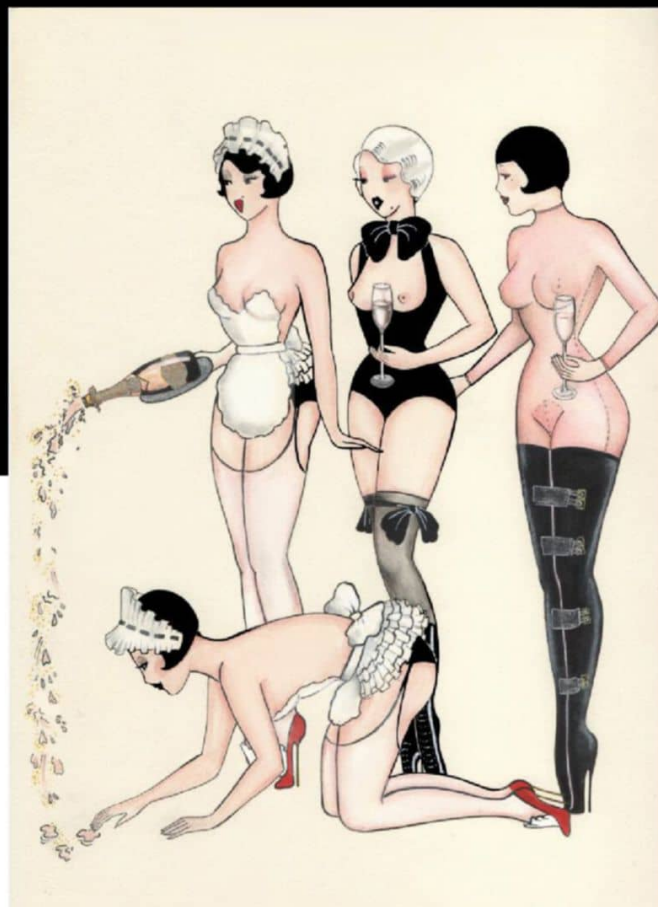
Meet the Anonymous Artists Behind the Sexy Art You're Double-Tapping on Instagram

Anonymity helps erotic artists go deeper, but censorship often halts their success

BY **CHLOE OLEWITZ**
PHOTO BY **KRISTEN LIU-WONG**

It's all in the scroll: From shocking line drawings to delicate watercolors and full-frontal nudity to suggestive sensuality, erotic art is ubiquitous on Instagram. There's something for everyone, but much of the art shares a common thread: Its creator is anonymous.

Art historian Amalia Russiello says anonymity has served to protect artists from harsh repercussions throughout history. Artists in all eras have suffered physical violence, imprisonment or ostracism for crossing accepted social boundaries. "[Punishments] didn't just depend on the historical period, but also on the country and political situation," says Russiello, who also creates erotic art.



Champagne's Slave, courtesy Madame Dabi



Hide and Seek, courtesy Madame Dabi

Many artists still use anonymity to protect themselves, working under pseudonyms or invented identities. But even for artists who are safe from political persecution, anonymity has other benefits. Some artists use anonymity or pseudonyms to separate their professional reputations from their more risqué explorations. Russiello herself creates erotic art under the moniker Madame Dabi. “When one chooses to eliminate his or her name by choice, an enigma is created,” Russiello says. “The illustration is charged with mystery, giving the observer’s imagination the task of explaining the message independently of the image of the artist.”

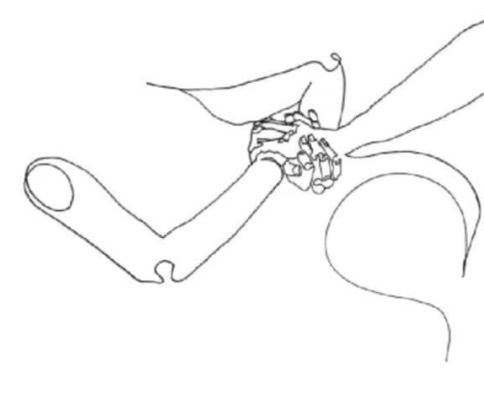
Other artists commit completely to their pseudonyms, obscuring any connection between lived identity and fabricated persona. Flowsofly, an Austrian artist who uses they/them pronouns as part of their mask of anonymity, says they first took to Instagram in 2015 as part of a personal challenge to post one sensual line drawing every day. Flowsofly wanted the freedom to play with their new style separate from their professional design career, and anonymity made that possible. Their anonymous account became so successful that in May 2020, they quit their day job to work as a full-time artist.



Courtesy Flowsofly

Flowsofly has maintained anonymity, even after gaining traction and going full-time, because it helps them keep the focus on the art rather than their personal identity. Viewers often spend a lot of energy seeking to understand an artist in order to better appreciate their work. In an effort to break such associations, Flowsofly erases their identity and creates work from a range of gender perspectives, instead of centering their own gaze. They also want to encourage viewers to use their imagination to step inside the scenes. “Having an anonymous account helps people put their own interpretations into the foreground, instead of trying to interpret what they see through the artist’s eye,” Flowsofly says. “It’s encouraging to watch two people standing in front of the same piece, seeing something different.”

For other artists, the mask of anonymity serves primarily as a

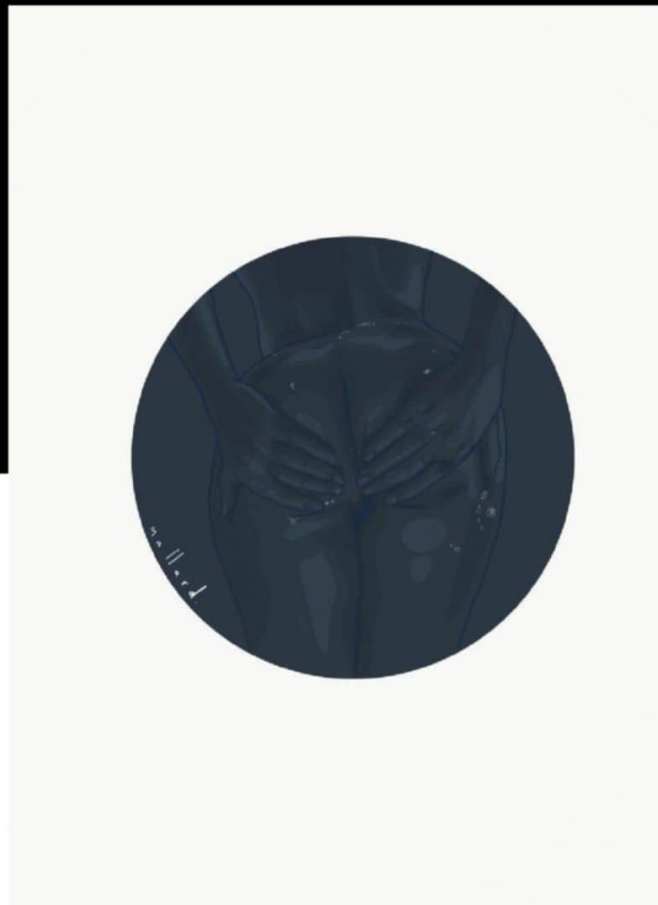


Courtesy Flowsofly

source of courage. Mallard, who says she hopes her mom doesn’t find out about her erotic art, feels emboldened by her anonymity. It liberates her to take risks and challenge her own boundaries, because the only fallout she worries about is losing followers or dealing with aggressive comments from strangers. “Without anonymity I wouldn’t draw half the things I do,” she says. “There are no real-life repercussions. It’s true expression and freedom.”

Freedom of expression can come at a higher price for non-pseudonymous artists like Kristen Liu-Wong. Liu-Wong, who makes erotic art using her legal name, has noticed firsthand the effect of being transparent with her identity. “A lot of people put their personal baggage on you and your work,” she says. “As a woman, that can quickly dissolve into unwanted advances and nasty comments. If I were an anonymous, genderless artist, I would probably get taken advantage of a lot less and I would personally feel emboldened to ask for more.”

Although anonymity can protect and embolden creators, there are also downsides—especially online. It can be difficult to turn digital popularity into real-world opportunity when you’re committed to remaining anonymous, a lesson Flowsofly has learned the hard way. “I’ve been invited to events and to do live drawing sessions. I think they would have been really fun, and they could have helped show my works to the world,” they say. “But I declined. I didn’t want to give up my anonymity.”



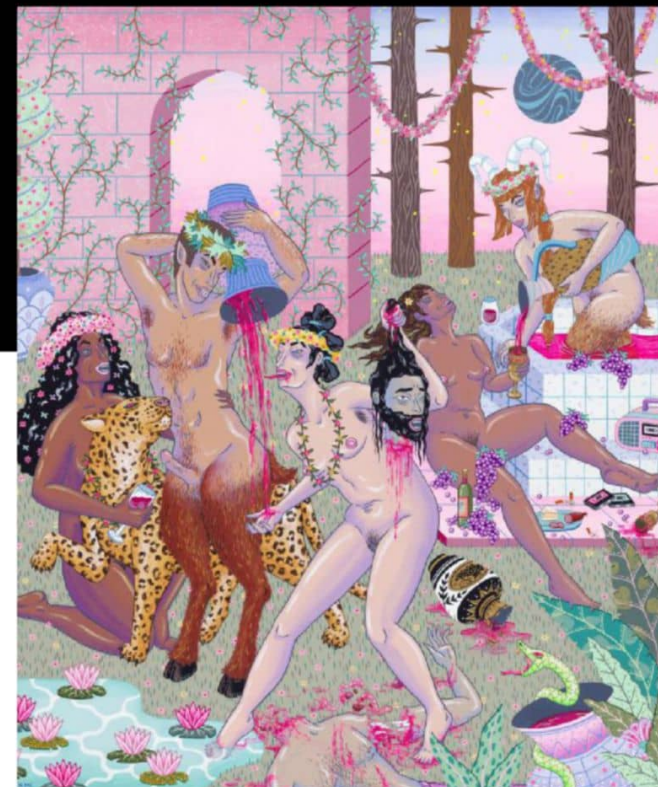
WAP, courtesy Mallard



Wet Afternoon, courtesy Mallard

For artist La Moufette, that dilemma was compounded by the question of ownership. When he started his first erotic art account on Instagram in 2015, there wasn't anything out there that resembled his work. He racked up thousands of followers seemingly overnight, but it didn't take long for copycats to start ripping off his work. They even reported La Moufette for "stealing" his own art. One of his copycats has been reposting La Moufette's original art for at least two years, but the real La Moufette can't get the fake account deleted.

In addition to battling online art theft, La Moufette also faced a series of devastating account deletions. As his popularity grew, people started reporting his work. La Moufette says his drawings were suggestive but not explicit; Instagram deleted his whole account anyway. After bouncing back quickly with a second account, La Moufette discovered that many of his fans were sex workers and porn actors. When they shared his work, the discrimination they face daily on the platform trickled down to his account. It was deleted again, and then a third time.



PentheusWasADisbeliever, courtesy Kristen Liu-Wong

With each deletion, active direct-message conversations with potential art clients vanished. "That was the most disappointing thing," he says. The account closures forced La Moufette to relinquish his anonymity. After starting over for a fourth time, he set his account to private, started posting less frequently and publicly linked to his Kai Suppel account, where he posts tattoo art under his given name.

In the course of reporting this article, the fourth La Moufette account was deleted. "I guess Instagram is no longer the place for it," Suppel says. This is the constant struggle for anonymous erotic artists on Instagram. For example, Flowsofly's account remains online and visible, but only to



GetItClean, courtesy Kristen Liu-Wong

some; Playboy's editorial team still can't access their page.

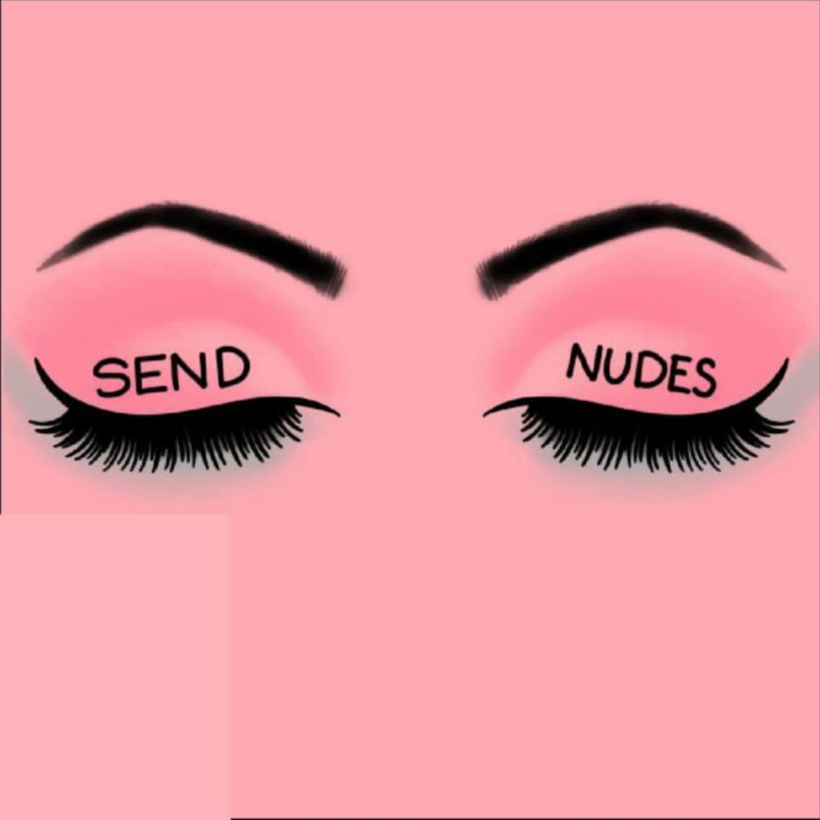
Regards Coupables, a French artist who uses anonymity to eliminate assumptions about their identity based on their erotic illustrations, is no stranger to this pattern of censorship. Their account was deleted twice in three years. "I live in constant fear that it will happen again," they say. "I've been looking for other platforms since I lost my first account, but I feel terribly dependent and bridled. Dependent because overnight everything can disappear, and bridled because the restrictions related to the conditions of use are very strict, especially when it comes to eroticism and nudity."

Kristen Liu-Wong has also called out the stark double standard in Instagram's opaque community guidelines. "I know people who have reported child pornography, and nothing happened," she says. "But a fully censored post of mine"—Liu-Wong sometimes uses emoji to cover up for nudity she worries will get her work flagged—"can be removed twice without any consideration."

“Without anonymity I wouldn't draw half the things I do. There are no real-life repercussions. It's true expression and freedom.”



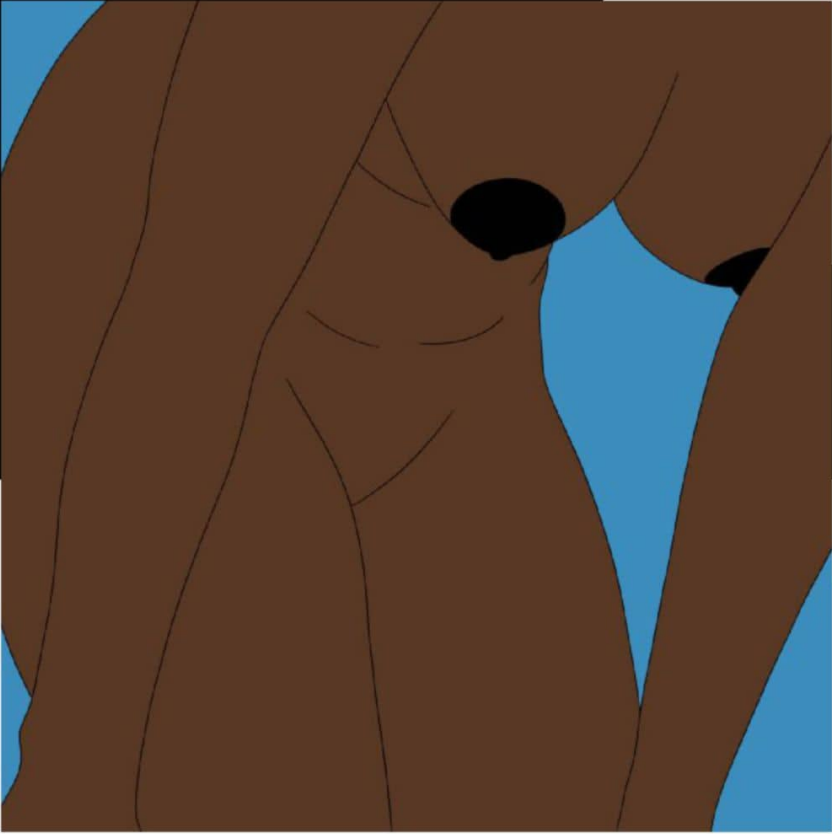
Courtesy La Moufette



Courtesy La Moufette

Some anonymous artists take censorship in stride, treating it as a cost of doing business on Instagram. Flowsofly says that usually fewer than 10 of the more than 300 images they post each year get deleted, but they hold back more explicit works out of fear of losing the account and the connection it provides to so many fans around the world.

Many erotic artists feel stuck between a rock and a hard place with Instagram. Twitter doesn't have the same visual focus, and Tumblr banned adult content in December 2018, alienating a huge community of artists and their fans. Artists are left with little recourse when it comes to theft and censorship, but they feel tied to Instagram nonetheless. Regards Coupables says they have had four Instagram posts deleted in three weeks, but still haven't found an alternative platform they feel is suitable. They still prioritize anonymity, even if it means shouldering more risk. "When it comes to sex, knowing the gender of the artist can change the interpretation of the work," they say.



Courtesy Regards Coupables

Other artists treat censorship as a matter of principle, seeing it as an attack on open and fluid representations of sexuality and sexual expression. Liu-Wong feels it's her duty to speak out against censorship specifically because of her identity as a young woman in America. "In some ways, I feel obliged to mention every single time I am censored, instead of just quietly taking it like women have had to do throughout history," she says. "I don't have to do that, so I won't."

Anonymity presents a matrix of pros and cons that



Courtesy Regards Coupables

make the game seem impossible to win. To art historian Russiello, anonymity also has the potential to serve as a broader statement on the medium in which it appears and on the art world at large. "The absence of a name can be read as a criticism of the art market and the system of artistic trade," she says. By erasing their identities and presenting their work on Instagram, anonymous erotic artists level a stinging commentary on the cult of personality and celebrity in the contemporary art world. If one of the core upshots of the Instagram era is that anyone can call themselves an artist, anonymous erotic artists prove that, when it comes to the art that really gets us going, the artist could be anyone.



Among **the Atheists**

A former minister immerses himself in the American Atheists convention, bearing witness to the nonbeliever movement as it rises from the ashes of 2016

BY J.W. HOLLAND

ILLUSTRATIONS BY EDEL RODRIGUEZ

Touching down at Will Rogers airport in Oklahoma City, I request a ride; within minutes a young woman named Sandra pulls up to take me to my hotel. Contemporary Christian music plays quietly from her radio, a cross hangs from the rearview and a Bible peeks out from the door pocket at my feet. I recognize Sandra, though not personally. Sandra is me several years ago, back when I was on a mission to save a world doomed to hell by any means necessary. Planting seeds, we called it.

What she doesn't know, and what I don't bother to tell her, is that I was ordained as a minister in the Southern Baptist Convention. Sandra might have admired me back when I was attending dinner parties with Judge Roy Moore and riding on Herman Cain's bus. Now she probably wouldn't be a fan. About six years ago, after a long stretch of mounting self-hate and force-fed guilt, I became an atheist. Today, Sandra's passenger is in town to attend the 2018 American Atheists National Convention.

I was raised to believe that Madalyn Murray O'Hair, founder of American Atheists and subject of the recent Netflix docudrama *The Most Hated Woman in America*, was

a drug-addled, devil-worshipping sex maniac. So I honestly have no idea what to expect at this convention except maybe drug-addled, sex-crazed devil-worshipping. Just a few years ago I might have been in the street, protesting such an event, and now I'm a registered attendee.

What a time to be alive.

I'm here, in part, to see how the atheist movement, the vanguard of the roughly 27 percent of Americans who identify as nonreligious, has changed since the election of Donald Trump. Does the president's overwhelming support from evangelical Christian voters stand to threaten the rights of nonbelievers and religious liberty itself? White evangelicals, according to the Pew Research Center, gave Trump 81 percent of their vote, at least three percent more than they gave any of the previous three Republican presidential nominees.

With his track record of rough language and sexual bravado and apparent zeal for most of the deadly sins, Trump does not immediately come across as the man for dedicated Christians. (He called the Bible his favorite book in a 2015 interview and then declined to identify a single verse.) Barack Obama was a professing Christian long before he entered the White House, and yet evangelicals by and large despised him. George W. Bush, a man of deep faith who shares the evangelical vision of a Second Coming, garnered nearly the same

base as Trump. If you disregard the possibility of this support having anything to do with sexism, racism, homophobia and xenophobia, it would take quite a bit of mental gymnastics to make sense of the current situation.

In a noisy banquet room being prepared for the American Atheists' awards dinner, I meet up with Alison Gill, the group's legal and policy director, and staff attorney Geoffrey Blackwell to get a better understanding of what they've seen in the past two years. Gill tells me that, on the bright side, "there has been a real resurging interest in the electoral process and government." Many activists, advocates and philanthropists want to be more involved than before; she cites a "new wave of people" who are interested in running for office.

Gill also admits, "At the federal level we've just seen a wave of negative changes that really impede the separation of government and religion, a far greater assault than we could have first suspected."

Blackwell says one of the most consequential issues he is seeing is "the appointment of very questionable judges to federal judgeships." The Obama administration struggled to fill these openings, but the current administration is working more efficiently to load them with "far-right religious conservatives who are really putting at risk a lot of the precedents that our current understanding of religious freedom depends on." Blackwell adds that Trump could end up appointing as many as 30 percent of those critical slots.

Gill points out that so far those confirmations include Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch and Seventh Circuit judge Amy Coney Barrett. Gorsuch authored the extremely conservative opinion *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, and Barrett, according to Gill, "was an academic who sought to advance the role of religion in interpreting certain legal rules and bodies of law."

So it comes as a surprise when Gill and Blackwell mention that American Atheists finds agreement among some religious organizations. It turns out the Johnson Amendment—the 1954 tax code provision that prohibits all 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates—has detractors on both sides. More than 100 religious organizations from around the country signed a letter to Trump last August, asking him to protect the Johnson Amendment. "Churches all over the country don't want politics drawn into the sanctuary," Blackwell says. With their flocks shrinking, some religious leaders are apparently concerned with Trump's promises to repeal the amendment: "Why put churches in a position where they feel obligated to take a political position if they weren't already doing so?" Blackwell says. He adds that on several individual issues, including how nonprofits are treated by the IRS, churches and atheists stand together—"even if we disagree on the question of whether or not there is a deity."

Neda Bolourchi, a research associate at the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empirics at Columbia University, shares Blackwell's sentiments about finding common ground. Over e-mail she tells me that "there has been a confluence of support for the Johnson Amendment.... All of these have come together because they do not believe that religion is encumbered by this law, which has existed for over 50 years and been supported by both parties and all branches of government." Bolourchi believes the only groups that would oppose this law are those that see 501(c)(3) organizations as easy vessels to introduce nearly untraceable "dark money" into politics. With the 2010 *Citizens United* decision and the

The estimated number of nontheists makes them the largest voting group in the country.

financial floodgates it opened to campaign contributions, you can see a problem here: Millions of churches in America could become individual political action committees funded by virtually anonymous donors. Not only is that a problem for fair elections; it could also lead to compromised control over local religious bodies.

While much of the convention was focused on fighting what its organizers view as the current threats to the separation of church and state, an almost equal amount of time was spent examining the steps atheists must take to claim an equal place in American society. The next day I meet with David Silverman, president of American Atheists, in the speakers' green room. Less than two weeks after the close of the convention, Silverman will be fired after a brief investigation into sexual and financial misconduct. In a statement on his Facebook page, he will write (and then delete), "I categorically deny any wrongdoing, legally or ethically." But here at the convention, Silverman is focused on a different upheaval.

"I think what we have seen over the past couple of years is a terrible depression on behalf of most of the American Atheists movement," he says. President Obama had an open-door policy with religious and nonreligious leaders alike, even favorably mentioning the latter in his second inaugural address: "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus and nonbelievers." To date, Trump has refused to meet with the nontheistic community. "We went from a very high place to a very low place," Silverman says. "We weren't ready for that defeat."

But this is a convention, not a wake, and Silverman makes a point that will echo many times throughout the weekend—a point that ironically reminds me of religious groups that faced skepticism at best and bigotry at worst before entering the American mainstream. "I think we have seen the bottom," he says. "This convention will be used to elevate the rest of the movement. If we come out and stop hiding behind euphemisms like agnostic or humanist, if we actually call ourselves atheists, we will be able to take our place at society's table almost immediately."

With more than 850 attendees and a celebrity keynote speaker—House star Hugh Laurie—American Atheists appears to be taking its message on a more mainstream path than ever before. As I stand in the back of the ballroom, I can't help noticing the attentiveness of the crowd. The room is packed but hushed. I don't remember ever seeing a gathering this engaged for this length of time, even back in my days as a minister. The applause seems genuine, with the occasional standing ovation; none of it comes across as forced.

From the start of the convention, there has been an electric-



Keynote speaker Hugh Laurie



Black Nonbelievers president Mandisa Thomas



Comedian Victor Harris Jr.

ity in the air. In every corner of the hotel, I see attendees in deep conversation about everything from politics to sexuality. I find myself sharing personal information that many in my own family don't know, and I sense no judgment. It occurs to me that I have never been this at ease with any other group of people in my life.

Multiple speakers extol the size of the country's atheist voting bloc: The estimated number of nontheists, even on the modest end, makes them the largest voting group in the country. A 2016 Pew poll identified 20 percent of voters as white Evangelicals, while 21 percent held no religion—a whopping seven percent increase since 2008. Add that to a recent University of Kentucky study that shows as many as 26 percent of the population may be atheists, and you begin to see the potential influence of an organized nonreligious community. As Silverman suggested in our conversation, the issue among this group is not size but visibility. To harness our considerable potential, atheists must be

more outspoken about our beliefs, or lack thereof.

Perhaps that emergence is already under way. Atheists are finding modest success in areas previously unthinkable: In Tennessee, Gayle Jordan, the executive director of Recovering From Religion, an organization that helps people deal with the repercussions of leaving their faith, ran for state senate, gaining around 30 percent of the vote in a deep red and highly religious district. Jordan tells me during the convention that her democratic supporters “were mostly religious people, and I ran as an out and open atheist.” Shockingly, she was also able to garner the support of many among the state's Tea Party. Faced with the choice between “an unethical Christian Republican or an ethical Democratic atheist,” Jordan tells me it was remarkable to see the voters of her district support her. Remarkable indeed, considering the results of the 2016 presidential elections. But when you consider the right's almost three decades of attacks on Hillary

Clinton's character, it becomes clearer how evangelical voters were able to justify voting for Trump.

The most encouraging moment of the weekend comes when I introduce myself to Mandisa Thomas, president and founder of Black Nonbelievers, an organization dedicated to support and visibility for black atheists. Thomas, who was raised nonreligious, tells me that black nonbelievers often think they're the only ones in what are traditionally heavily religious areas: “To say that you're an atheist in the black community is almost like you're trying to reject your race.” The reality, she says, is that with wildly disproportionate levels of violence, poverty and disease afflicting so many black communities, thoughts and prayers aren't going to cut it.

“You have to say enough is enough,” she tells me. “At what point is praying or going to church going to resolve that? At what point are you going to start thinking for yourself and putting more evidence-based measures into place?”

That, in a nutshell, is what I take away from the convention: If you want things to change, you have to change them. Of course many religious organizations do great things for society, but those things often come with strings attached. Nonbelievers have the power to do good without the promise or threat of an omnipotent being.

I would like to say atheists have cornered the market on character, but Silverman's messy departure from the organization just days after the convention serves as a reminder: No group is free of human error or frailty. Still, the work goes on. At the end of the convention—Easter Sunday, as it happens—organizers and volunteers purchase, pack and donate 30,000 meals for needy families in the area. Hundreds of atheists, including Dr. House, work shoulder to shoulder in a hotel ballroom. I leave for my ride back to the airport more encouraged than I've felt in years—not just in atheists but in humankind as a whole. One ideology doesn't control the narrative for acts of kindness; it's the responsibility of us all.

After that weekend in Oklahoma City, I feel empowered to parrot the sentiment of Hugh Laurie, who told a packed ballroom, “I stand before you a proud atheist.”

If I ever see Sandra again, I'm going to tell her.



A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is shown in profile, wearing a white and black VR headset. Her right hand is raised high in the air, palm facing forward. The background is a solid, vibrant red. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong red glow and some blue/purple highlights on the woman's face and hand. The overall mood is futuristic and immersive.

Virtual Satisfaction

VR porn is the latest offspring of a lucrative, centuries-old marriage between tech and erotica. Playboy travels to a Beverly Hills mansion for a behind-the-scenes look at the most titillating content feeding the \$515.00 billion VR industry machine

BY JESSICA P. OGILVIE

Christie Stevens is on her knees, gazing up at Isiah Maxwell, her mouth agape. Her breasts bounce with every bob of her head, and her platinum blonde hair cascades down her pale back, grazing the top of her sacrum tattoo.

“My husband,” she says, grasping Maxwell’s large manhood with both hands and looking directly into his brown eyes, “would never do this.”

A dozen or so men stand around watching this scene in various states of discomfort. Three are journalists, and this is the best day of their lives. Two are tech entrepreneurs, tentatively exploring the pornography industry as a means of financing their VR start-up. The rest are adult-industry insiders, and this is just another day on the job.

Today’s shoot, hosted by the adult-video company BaDoink, looks fairly standard as porn shoots go. Stevens wanders around the sparsely furnished modern five-story Beverly Hills mansion in thigh-high stockings and a sheer bra, her makeup artist providing the occasional touch-up. The 30-year-old, five-foot-two actress works on her lines; in this film, she plays a bored housewife who sexually accosts an unsuspecting door-to-door vacuum salesman.

But the shoot marks a turning point for porn and for technology at large; it’s being filmed for virtual reality, the hardware for which hit shelves en masse in 2016. Stevens has been working in porn for five years and has performed in upward of 250 productions. But this is the first she’s done for virtual reality. And while she doesn’t yet know what’s in store for her today, the premise for you, the consumer, is clear: Stevens isn’t fucking Maxwell. She’s fucking you.

Plenty of point-of-view scenes have been shot in modern pornography. In most of them, a male actor films a woman as they have sex. The man’s face rarely appears, so the footage approximates what the viewer would see if he were having sex with the woman himself.

Virtual-reality porn takes this concept to a new level by not only breaking the fourth wall but demolishing it altogether. When you strap on a virtual-reality headset, your physical world disappears. Instead of watching a computer screen, you’re transported to the room the actress is in. Your hands aren’t encumbered by a keyboard or a mouse. You’re no longer simply observing the fantasy; you’re inside it.

This new level of erotic escapism, many experts believe, heralds the future of porn and, by extension, the future of technology itself.

Pornography has a storied history as technology’s inadvertent harbinger. According to tech experts and porn insiders, when a new device makes porn more accessible, that pornographic content helps usher the device onto the market.

“People who are willing to pay for porn popularize the technology,” says Jonathan Coopersmith, a technology historian at Texas A&M University. “That drives down the price.”

This wisdom comes from the commonsense notion that people are biologically predisposed to look at erotic images.

To get a sense of just how far back this hard-wiring goes, we can turn to our trusty Neanderthal predecessors. Their cave renderings can be interpreted in only one way, says Bryant Paul, a faculty affiliate at the Kinsey Institute. They were “just vulvas,” he says. Cavemen were “getting off on that.”

The practice of sketching women’s naked bodies carried on for millennia, as evidenced by a quick lap around any fine arts museum. Then, in 1839, the first practical photographic process—the daguerreotype—was invented. Within seven years, Victorian pornographers had created the world’s first adult-themed photograph. That pattern repeated with the invention of the motion picture camera in 1889; seven years later, the first pornographic film was shot: *Le Coucher de la Mariée*, featuring cabaret performer Louise Willy doing a striptease in her bedroom.

When the VHS and home entertainment center hit U.S. shelves in 1977, porn watching was again upended as people realized they could screen adult films at home. By the end of the decade, adult videos accounted for more than half of all prerecorded tapes sold in the U.S.

“The introduction of the VCR and playback,” says Frederick Lane, author of *Obscene Profits: The Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age*, “was the most fundamental shift in the consumption of pornography in human history.”

It is unsurprising, then, that when the internet arrived for the masses in the 1990s, all hell broke loose. Like their forefathers, consumers almost immediately put the new technology to use to watch people having sex. Pornographers, meanwhile, had content that was easily repurposed: Preexisting footage could be cut, edited and sold to websites.

Internet porn quickly became the first industry to profit from online sales. According to a report by the National Research Council, in 2001 the online adult industry in the U.S. generated about \$18.00 billion; by 2013, all porn sites had more visitors than Netflix, Amazon and Twitter combined.

Then, in 2016, came virtual reality.

Virtual reality as we have come to know it began in 2012 when 19-year-old Palmer Luckey launched a Kickstarter for what would become the world’s first consumer-friendly, commercially successful VR headset: Oculus Rift. Luckey created Oculus with gamers in mind, but after his device was shown at 2012’s E3 conference, he was flooded with offers from major tech investors. His Kickstarter raised \$2.4 million. In 2014, Mark Zuckerberg bought Luckey’s company, Oculus VR, for \$35.00 billion.

Modern virtual-reality content is little more than 180- and 360-degree images repurposed;

VR porn not only breaks the fourth wall but demolishes it. You’re no longer observing the fantasy; you’re inside it.

the same technology is used by Google Maps. In addition to Oculus and Google, the top players bringing these images to consumers via new viewing devices are Sony, Samsung and HTC Vive. Adult-entertainment companies investing heavily in VR pornographic content include BaDoink, Naughty America, VirtualRealPorn, Czech VR and VR Bangers.

These companies—and some of the guests at today’s shoot—face two primary hurdles: figuring out what kind of VR content consumers want and determining how best to shoot that content.

Sam Burton owns Holotrope VR, which he co-founded to develop new techniques for shooting VR. He comes from a film and television background, but his start-up operates in relatively unknown territory, so money isn’t yet pouring in from risk-averse mainstream businesses.

“The companies we normally work with aren’t really committing budgets,” he says. “The adult industry is starting to spend money. Not to boil it down to just dollars, but we are a start-up.”

So when Burton received BaDoink’s request to film today’s shoot, “it seemed like a good opportunity to bring in money for research and development, and to shoot in large volume,” he says.

And that’s how he found himself in this Beverly Hills home, doing his best to remain unobtrusive as Stevens walks around the house topless. To film her scene with Maxwell, Burton has

brought two different camera setups. One includes multiple GoPro cameras configured in a 360-degree rig. The other involves two cameras with fish-eye lenses, the 180-degree angle of which is designed to mimic the human eye.

The experience of the consumer who will later watch this footage can only be described as entering—as promised—a new reality. After putting on the VR headset, users will see their own surroundings replaced by this all-white living room and beige couch. To their left will be a spectacular view of Los Angeles; to their right, the door through which Maxwell—playing the part of the vacuum salesman—has just entered. And in front of them will be Stevens standing on a plush carpet and writhing her way out of her shirt, then her skirt and stockings, and then slowly lowering herself onto her knees to commence fellatio.

The fullness of the immersion can’t be overstated. VR porn is so engulfing that when the headset comes off after 25 minutes (or five, depending), it takes a good 10 seconds to reacclimate to the world in which you actually live. The experience is jarring, and it offers the staggering realization that with the mass introduction of VR, consumers who wish to truly escape their lives can do so. One can’t help but imagine socially awkward men deciding that virtual-reality porn is easier—and just as satisfying—as having sex with a real woman, but without commitment or even social niceties.

Advances in VR are coming hard and fast, and Facebook is leading the charge. At its third annual Oculus Connect conference last year, the company unveiled a handful of new VR projects, including Oculus Avatars, a program that allows consumers to create personal avatars using customized face shapes, clothing and skin tones (think metallic gold, forest green and shimmery purple). Mike Howard, Oculus Avatars’ project manager, told conference attendees that there are “over a billion permutations of options” for designing your virtual self.

Extrapolating the avatar concept into the future—and into the realm of sex, which Facebook demurely avoided—means that soon we’ll have the option of becoming idealized (or completely fake) versions of ourselves. Couldn’t bag the hot cheerleader in high school? Make yourself the star football player in VR. Of course, that cheerleader probably isn’t who she says she is either—but does it matter?

Facebook isn’t the only VR pioneer, and some competitors are focusing exclusively on pornography. Among the most innovative is Amsterdam-based Kiiroo. After pioneering a line of sex toys that can be operated from thousands of miles away, Kiiroo developed a program that attempts to bridge the most frequently cited gap in VR: You can see and hear what’s going on, but you can’t feel it. By syncing a male masturbator to virtual porn scenes, the program, FeelPornStars, allows users to physically experience the scene in real time. For instance: As you watch Stevens perform fellatio on your headset, your masturbator would be moving along with her.

Not everyone is convinced VR porn will take off. If the setup is too time-consuming, says Bryant Paul, it may miss the mark for consumers who just want to get off quickly. “If you can make it as easy to use as my computer, great,” he says. “If you’re creating technology that makes it harder, I don’t think it’s going to work.”

As of the end of last year, VR hardware hadn't sold as well as expected. In October, interactive-media research firm SuperData predicted that sales of VR headsets would hit 6.16 million in 2016. By November, that prediction had been downgraded to 4.12 million. The slow start is largely attributed to the high price of VR devices (a single headset can go for as much as R13,800.00), the fact that consumers and tech companies are still feeling out the best use for the technology and the lack of a must-have VR app.

But experts are still optimistic. Digi-Capital, which advises virtual-reality businesses, predicts that by 2020 revenue from VR content and headsets will reach R515.00 billion.

And for now, one truth is certain. "The thing that has been proven at this point," says Burton, "is that people will pay for porn."

Back in Beverly Hills, Christie Stevens is encountering some of the problems with shooting for VR that have yet to be ironed out. She and Maxwell have commenced the vaginal intercourse portion of the day, but she's getting no help from him. Usually it's the job of the male porn actor to help the female performer look good—angling her properly, making sure her back is arched and her breasts are on display—but here, the camera is strapped to Maxwell's shoulder to provide the best possible point-of-view angle. His primary responsibilities are staying hard and not moving.

Stevens, then, is doing all the work. She faces forward and straddles him, inserting his penis into her vagina while maintaining eye contact with the camera. She then stands up, turns around and reinserts him while facing backward, before finally engaging in what can only be described as a sexual triceps dip: Facing forward again, Stevens places her feet astride Maxwell's hips, her hands on the coffee table behind her, and slides onto his penis, all while maintaining an uncomfortable-looking crab position.

Editing isn't possible yet in virtual reality, so Stevens continues these sexual acrobatics for a single 25-minute shot with no break. That means she can't lube up, wipe sweat away or even rest her quaking muscles.

Was it difficult, I ask her afterward, to engage in such demanding physical labor? "I'm gonna be honest," she says. "It was a lot of work."

Was it harder to get turned on than it might have been if she was, say, on a bed with a participating partner? "It was fine," she says.

After all, she adds, dabbing her glistening forehead, "It's still sex."



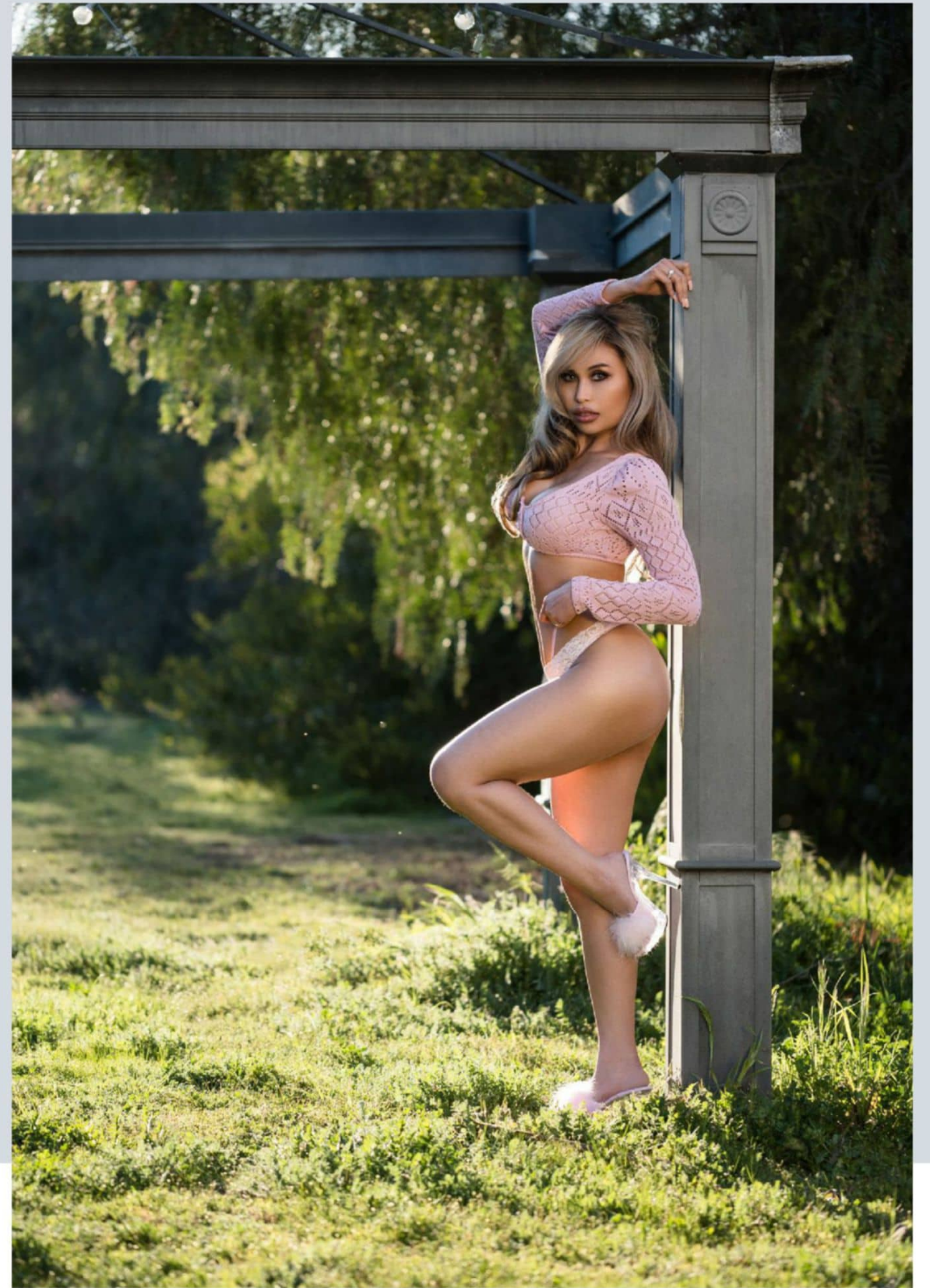


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Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! What are the plans this year for you? Aside from modeling, I'm also a writer. I've written two feature scripts that I plan on taking into fruition this year. I'm also the star of an upcoming paranormal documentary that will debut next year in the spring.

What is at the top of your list to achieve the most in the year of 2022? I plan to finally cultivate all my passions. Writing, dance, modeling, acting. And taking all of those onto the next level.

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? It means a tremendous amount. I find an individual is more attractive when they are confident and focused. Determination and knowing that the sky is the limit really portrays a person in a beautiful light.

What would you say makes you stand out in the industry? Honestly, who else do you know that's a model by day, ghost hunter by night, is a published author, dancer on the weekends, and acts on film. Enough said lol

Where are we most likely to find you if not in front of the camera being glamorous? Being completely silly with my family. I'd say our favorite thing to do is cuddling on the couch and watching movies while eating junk food.

What are some of your biggest passions? Writing and dancing. Ghost hunting and researching. And creating art. My top 5.

3 ultimate deal-breakers when it comes to men? Dishonesty is so unattractive to me. Being a bully is despicable. And being jealous undeniably shows a lack of confidence, which to me, is so unsexy.

What are some of the things that attract you to a man? I love strong men. Like a manly man. He doesn't have to be like a bodybuilder or anything, just a fighter and protector of his family.

Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years? Hopefully incorporating all my passions into one roof and making a business/company out of it.

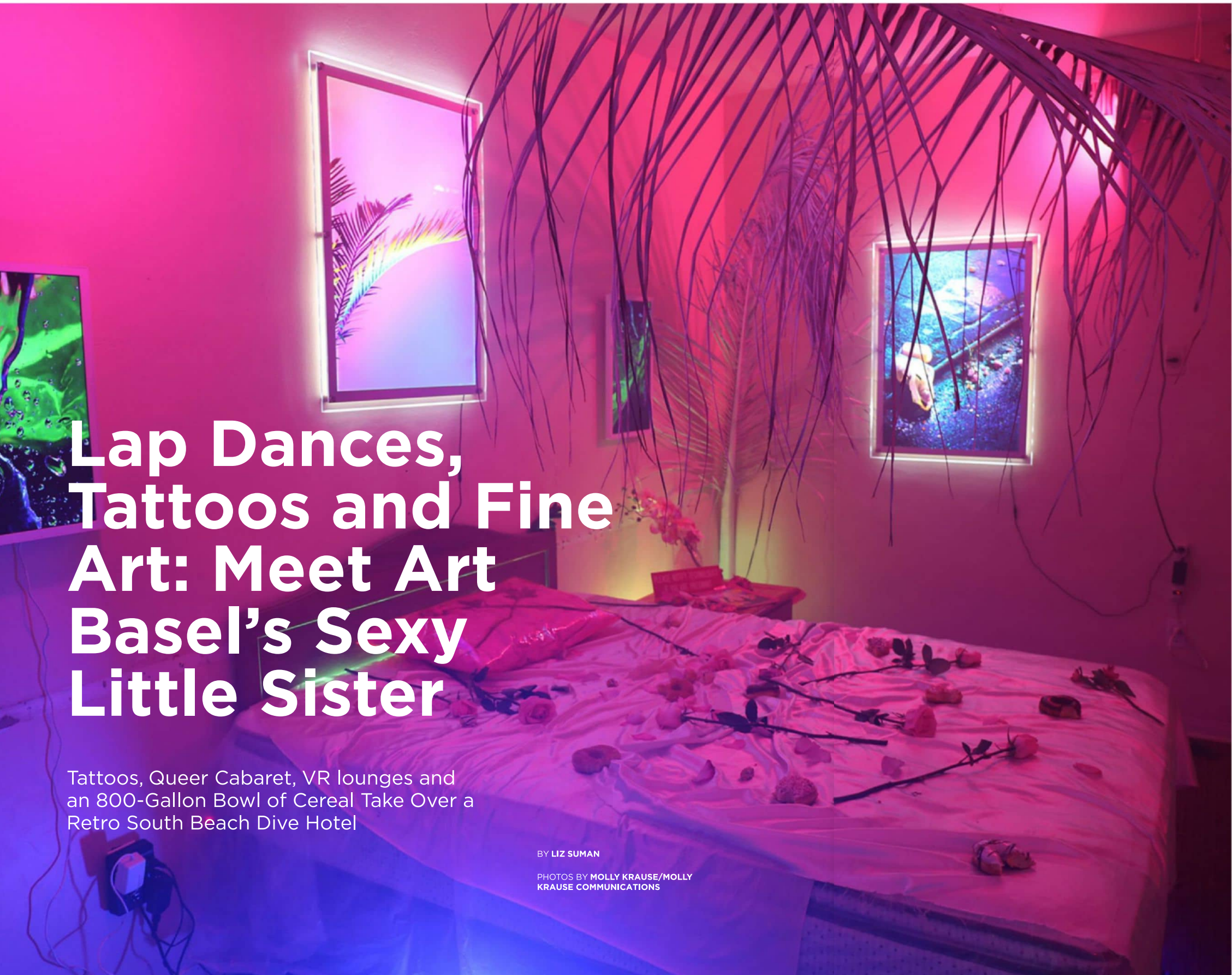
What is the wrong way to approach you as an admirer? If you play too many games and don't know what you want, well let me make it easy for you, you and I are NEVER gonna happen. I don't have time for games.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? My Instagram @aprilbayinsta. And from there, I'll have future updates for my upcoming website and projects.

We are so happy to have gotten to know you a little bit! Any last words out there for our readers? Yes! Be kind to one another. You don't know what someone else is going through....







Lap Dances, Tattoos and Fine Art: Meet Art Basel's Sexy Little Sister

Tattoos, Queer Cabaret, VR lounges and an 800-Gallon Bowl of Cereal Take Over a Retro South Beach Dive Hotel

BY LIZ SUMAN

PHOTOS BY MOLLY KRAUSE/MOLLY KRAUSE COMMUNICATIONS

If you're among the tens of thousands of art lovers currently flying south to brave Art Basel Miami Beach 2016, you face the daunting prospect of prioritizing which of #ABMB16's hundreds of events and exhibits to pack into a single weekend of sandy, overstimulating days and sticky, mojito-drenched nights. While there's plenty of beauty and talent to glean from Basel's official programming, you're likely to reach a point when the thought of one more confusing minute with a velvet-roped, armed-guarded Banksy car door with a R2,508,700.00 price tag makes you want to exit through the Miami Convention Center gift shop.

Luckily, there are other options. One of them is SAT-ELLITE, a smaller, seedier fair that champions uncensored creativity and a multi-disciplinary mix of high- and lowbrow contributors, and serves as an antidote to Basel's more white-walled fare. The second edition of the concept-based, artist-driven event features 45 exhibitors spanning four stories of repurposed hotel rooms in a Miami Vice-style dive hotel in the art deco mecca that is South Beach's Collins Avenue. Highlights of the second annual edition of the Basel satellite's #notbasel lineup include a queer "strip club" hosted by a Julliard-trained ballerina, virtual reality aromatherapy lounges, a 24/7 performance art space, a fully operational "post-feminist" tattoo parlor, and an 800-gallon cereal bowl perma-lubed with a live-action stream of artificial milk. Visitors can top off a day of cultural enrichment with post-art partying in a nightly after-hours penthouse.

Along with the rare chance to 'gram a giant milk fountain, the indie fair's takeaways include the opportunity to view visual art in combination with other creative and sensory experiences, all of which are cool but don't require a fat checkbook or the ability to discern cubism from surrealism. Where else can you check out a Venice Biennale U.A.E. Pavilion artist, enjoy a lap dance and leave with some fresh ink? As the fair's director Brian Whiteley puts it: "We believe art can be marketable and still have a soul."





Author
**Don Winslow
Says Your
Weed Habit
Finances Killers**

BY CAT AUER

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL LIONSTAR



The blockbuster writer on bad guys (there are plenty in ‘The Cartel,’ his latest inspired-by-true-life novel) and good sex scenes

Best-selling novelist Don Winslow’s past is practically as colorful as the stories he crafts. Raised by a sailor and a librarian, he was instilled early on with a love of books and storytelling. Winslow knew when he was young that he wanted to be a writer but took jobs across the board and around the world: teaching Shakespeare in Oxford, leading safaris and tours in Africa and China, doing private investigation in California and New York. An epiphany in Africa led him to buckle down and finally pursue his dreams, writing his first novel, A Cool Breeze on the Underground, over three years. After a few more books and years of juggling writing and day jobs, he sold the manuscript for The Death and Life of Bobby Z to both Hollywood and Knopf. Since then, he’s been writing full-time.

His latest novel, The Cartel—an epic, cross-border vendetta saga set in the brutal world of Mexican drug trafficking—was published to copious critical acclaim. A sequel to the 2005 crime thriller The Power of the Dog, The Cartel picks up the story of DEA agent Art Keller and his nemesis, drug kingpin Adán Barrera. Having spent close to a decade researching and writing a narrative that revolves around the narcotics trade, Winslow has become a passionate and outspoken advocate of ending the war on drugs; recently, he took out a full-page ad in The Washington Post. Addressed to members of Congress and the president, the eloquent open letter takes them to task for futile, ill-advised and destructive U.S. policies. “Let me come right out and say what you won’t tell the American people. The war on drugs is unwinnable,” Winslow argues. “At 44 years, it’s America’s longest war, and there’s no end in sight.”

Winslow, a PLAYBOY favorite — his short story By Sun and Lightning and his three-part serial Extreme both appeared in the magazine in 2014 — talked with us in a far-ranging conversation about everything from why he’s still writing about drugs to trying to get mugged to what makes for a good sex scene and why his best is yet to come.

PLAYBOY: The Cartel continues the drug-war tale of Art Keller and Adán Barrera. It’s been a decade since The Power of the Dog was published. What is it about the war on drugs that captured your attention and held it?

WINSLOW: I didn’t really want to write this one, to tell you the truth. I thought I was done with this topic. I first got into it because back in 1998 there was a massacre of 19 innocent people down in Baja, California. I asked myself how people could be capable of doing that — I didn’t really start out to write a book. I didn’t even start reading about drugs; I started reading about philosophy and ethics and that kind of thing, but I didn’t find any answers there. Then I started researching drug traffic and Mexico and the cartels, and that turned into Power of the Dog. Five years later, when I started The Cartel, the violence had spiraled so much out of control, past what any of us ever thought could happen — I guess I felt that I should similarly try to find some answers. So I started researching again, going to history and journalism and some of the sources that I’d had in Power of the Dog. I thought I saw some patterns and decided to write The Cartel, despite having denied to everybody — my wife, my agent, my friends — that I was going to do it.

PLAYBOY: What kind of patterns did you notice?

WINSLOW: Things have changed. One of the major changes was the militarization of drug

“The people who are partying on coke and marijuana and all of that need to take the responsibility of knowing where it comes from. And it comes from sociopathic mass murderers.”

trafficking, where one cartel hired their own private army. They recruited a bunch of special forces soldiers who’d been trained largely in the United States and got them to desert and come over to the other side. That sort of started an arms race between the cartels, where each leader decided that he or in some cases she needed to get their own private armies. You had this escalation of the lethality, of the people and of the weaponry. It used to be that these drug traffickers would slug it out themselves with a few guys, but now they farm it out to these armies made up of special forces or current or ex-police. In 2006, when the Mexican government decided to try to crack down, it realized it couldn’t do it with the police; it had to send in the military, and that escalated things all the more.

PLAYBOY: Given the depth of your research, were you ever tempted to write nonfiction on the topic?

WINSLOW: Well, I thought about it. I always start off in nonfiction mode in order to research. I’m a historian by training and kind of a geek, so that’s automatically where I go. With The Cartel, when I was just trying to find answers and lying to myself that I wasn’t doing it to write a book [laughs], I started a chronology because I’m a big believer that C follows B and B follows A. I jotted down anything that happened related to the drug wars in Mexico on any given day. I ended up with a 157-page single-spaced document. I really discovered things. But I think that, really, I’m a better novelist than a nonfiction writer. And I think novels can do things that journalism can’t or isn’t allowed to. We get to imagine the inner thoughts and emotions of people, we get to make things up, we get to take real events but put them in dramatic structures.

PLAYBOY: You dedicate The Cartel to 131 journalists in Mexico who were murdered or “disappeared” during the period the book covers. Can you talk about that?

WINSLOW: I have very high regard for journalism. I read five newspapers a day; I’m a news junkie. I felt I owed it to these men and women who were killed for trying to do this job. While I’m not a journalist, I am a fellow writer, and I feel something of a brotherhood and a sisterhood there. I thought they deserved to be named. The cartels had become so sophisticated that they had figured out they didn’t just need to control the action, they needed to control the narrative. What we’re seeing from ISIS now I think is taken from the cartels.

PLAYBOY: You mention the parallels between the cartels and ISIS in your open letter to Congress; do you think ISIS is in some ways following the cartels’ playbook?

WINSLOW: Yeah, I do. Long before ISIS was putting out vid clips of their atrocities, the Zetas in Mexico were — and other cartels followed suit. They started that. They had the idea that they would control social media and journalism, newspapers. They attacked television and radio stations with rocket launchers and machine guns. It’s a war for drugs, but also a war against all kinds of freedoms, including freedom of the press — and in many ways a war against truth. And just as ISIS does, the cartels use it for terror, intimidation and, also in the same sick way that ISIS does, as a means of recruitment.

PLAYBOY: A thought that drug lord Adán Barrera has in The Cartel is, “The North Americans never learn” — a realization he uses to his advantage. You repeated the idea — “We never learn” — in your open letter. What’s the effect of not learning from our mistakes?

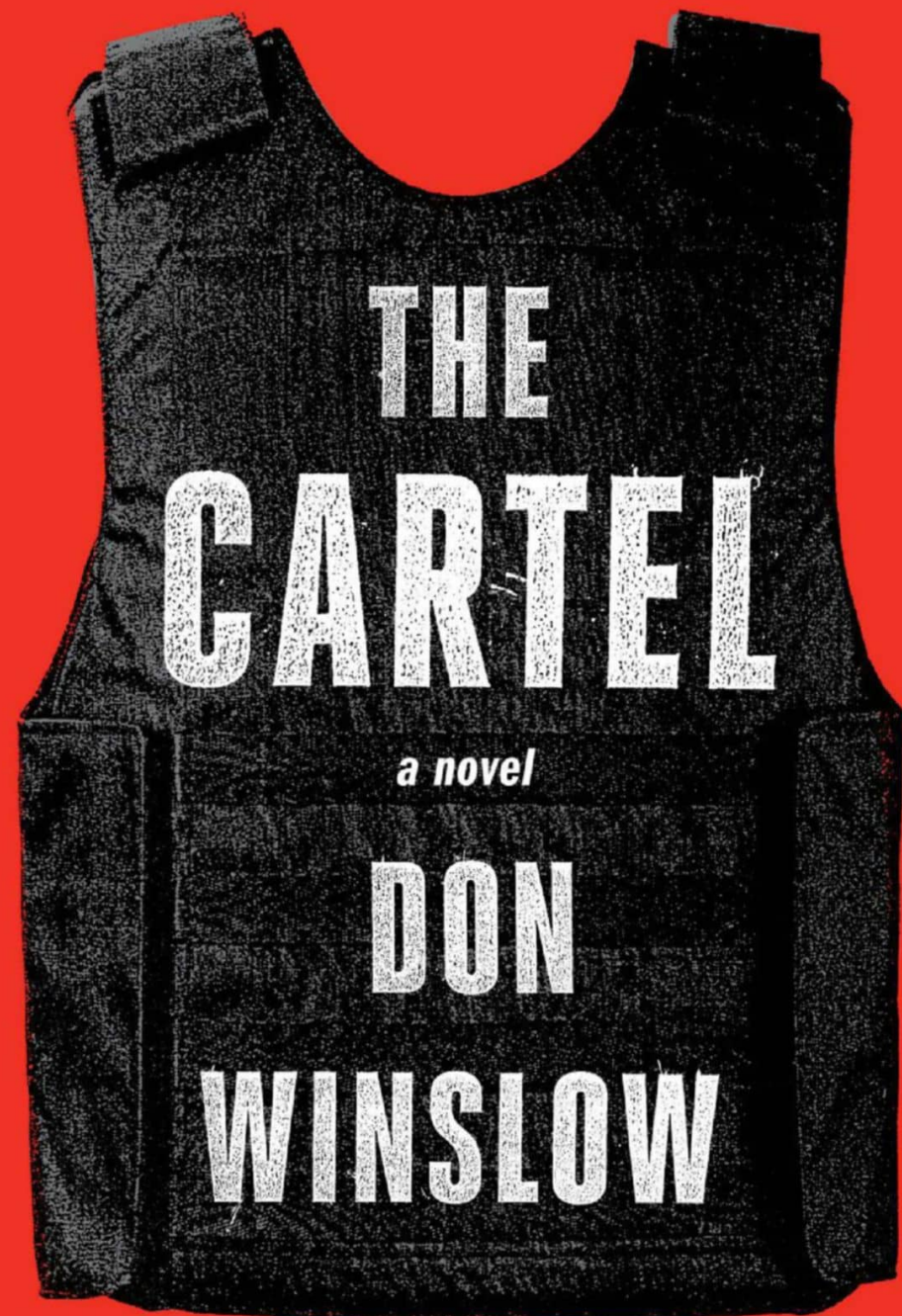
WINSLOW: The effect on Mexico, Central America and our own society has been catastrophic. In terms of the money we’ve spent, the lives that have been lost, the people we’ve put in prison, the families shattered, the social fabric shattered, the alienation between our police and our inner city communities — I had five cops call me commenting on that ad, saying, “I’d never say this in public, but you’re dead right; you got it exactly.”

PLAYBOY: Have you had any reaction from politicians?

WINSLOW: Not one. [Laughs] Maybe it was naïve or overly optimistic, but I had hoped that if I challenged them a bit in their hometown paper, which I hope appears on their desk with their coffee in the morning, that maybe I could get a conversation started. But no, I have not heard from a single politician.

PLAYBOY: Cannabis is gaining more and more acceptance legally, socially. What are your thoughts on America’s drug culture?

WINSLOW: My thoughts are complicated. We’re starting to legalize marijuana — it seems to be headed in that direction, and I think that’s a positive step, but it’s a partial step. It’s already had some beneficial effects. Since some states have legalized or decriminalized it, marijuana coming up through the border is down almost 40 percent. The cartels in Durango and Sinaloa are stopping growing the stuff because they can’t compete with the quality and prices in the United States. Just by ending the prohibition of marijuana in some states, we’ve cut



author of ***The Power of The Dog***

Courtesy Knopf

marijuana smuggling almost in half in two years, after 43 futile years. That's the positive effect. It's had a negative effect in the sense that the Sinaloa cartel, the dominant power by far in the Mexican drug scene, has responded to its loss of marijuana income by increasing production of heroin and lowering the price. The people who were getting street pills are now going to black-tar heroin because it's cheaper. Because it's illegal, the cartel still controls that business. I wonder what would happen if we legalized opiates, legalized heroin and all of that. We might, over the course of time, put the cartels out of business.

The other part of my feeling about American drug use — it's complicated, and it seems contradictory — is until we get our laws straightened out into some kind of sanity, I'm very much against recreational drug use. The people who are partying on coke and marijuana and all of that need to take the responsibility of knowing where it comes from. And it comes from sociopathic mass murderers.

PLAYBOY: So for you it's a moral issue?

WINSLOW: It is absolutely a moral issue. How can you say you'll only buy fair-trade coffee and then go smoke weed that might've been grown by slave labor in Mexico, by women who are standardly raped and turned out to prostitution? Drugs that've been muled up across the border by fathers, the cartels are holding their families until they deliver the drug and often kill them anyway? I blame the prohibition of drugs, but I also blame the recreational drug use. I just can't understand going out and having a good time on somebody else's suffering. Sorry to be preachy. People always give me the same answer — they know where their dope came from; it came from Eddie down the street, who grew it in his window box or in his bedroom. And I go, "Yeah, okay, but those trailer trucks are coming up full of something by the ton, and I don't think Eddie's growing that in his closet."

PLAYBOY: Your first novel, *A Cool Breeze* on the Underground, was published when you were in your late 30s. Tell me about what you were doing beforehand and how you came to writing.

WINSLOW: To be really honest with you, I've always wanted to do this. Since I was a little kid, this is what i've wanted to do — be a novelist. But, you know, the world didn't agree for a long time. I had to make a living, so I did a lot of different things. I managed movie theaters in New York, I was a private eye, I led photographic

“**Strong women are more fun to write; I try to write them because they're more interesting. If you met my wife, you'd understand.**”

safaris in Africa and China. I came back and went back to investigative work out here in California as a consultant to law firms. I taught Shakespeare in the summers at Oxford. I was cobbling together a living doing whatever I could do, all the time thinking, I want to be writing. But you come up with a lot of excuses for yourself, you know, because you're afraid of failing, and the psychological cost of failure would've been so high. Finally, I was sitting in Africa, at dawn — it sounds very melodramatic — by a fire, shivering a little bit from malaria, and I thought, "You'd just better do this and stop with the excuses." I decided to write five pages a day no matter what, and that's what I did. I think it was three years, and I had a book. Now, 14 publishers didn't think it was a book! *[Laughs]*

PLAYBOY: But that 15th...

WINSLOW: The 15th one did and gave me a two-book contract, and I was already writing the second one as I was getting rejection slips for the first.

PLAYBOY: And you were still doing side work?

WINSLOW: Yeah, I'd be doing stakeouts, scribbling away. The interview and research techniques I learned were really helpful. When I first started out [with investigative work], I did a lot of street work in New York in Times Square, looking for pickpockets, making low-level dope buys so we could turn it over to the police to chase them out, because we worked for businesses in the area. I was bait for a while. I would troll around, because I'm a small guy, trying to get mugged. We hired thugs to follow me and jump in; it was like the rodeo. Looking for runaway teenagers, stakeouts — that kind of stuff. Then at a later phase I did homicide cases, both for the prosecution and defense.

PLAYBOY: When were you able to set that aside and focus on writing 100 percent?

WINSLOW: I've been more or less a full-time writer since 1996 or 1997. I was commuting to downtown L.A., where I was working on a case in the same law office every day — in the Biltmore Hotel, actually, kind of a bit Raymond Chandler-esque. I would write a chapter going up and a chapter going down. It was just more fun to write a book than to read a book. It [The Death and Life of Bobby Z] sold to the movies on a Friday afternoon and sold to Knopf on the following Monday, and all of a sudden I could be a full-time writer.

PLAYBOY: Do you remember your first encounter with Playboy magazine?

WINSLOW: Of course, what American boy doesn't? In junior high, my friends Victor and Mark brought in a Playboy. They would cut it up and slip the pictures into their schoolbook folders, and we'd sell the pictures to other kids for 50 cents. [Laughs] Sure, I remember it very well. I also remember that Victor thought our 7th grade algebra teacher looked very much like one of the women in the magazine and actually went up and asked her. He got a vacation from school for a couple of weeks. We debated it for a long time. It was so titillating that we just couldn't resist discussing it. The possibility was just so mind-boggling when you're in seventh grade. It kept us going for a while. Algebra was pretty boring.

PLAYBOY: You've created plenty of strong, smart female characters, including in the short stories you did for PLAYBOY. How has your approach to writing women characters changed over the years?

WINSLOW: I think we've all sort of evolved a little bit, and women's roles have evolved. Strong women are more fun to write; I try to write them because they're more interesting. If you met my wife, you'd understand. I've been married to the same woman for 30 years, and she's a strong, wild woman. So I have that example always around me. [Laughs]

In terms of The Cartel, the role of women in Mexico in the drug scene has changed so radically in the past 10 years that it really demanded a very different look. You had things you'd never had before: Women cartel leaders, for instance, who took on roles because all the men had been killed or jailed; others who had been in prison for relatively minor crimes and met drug traffickers there and came out and decided, Yeah, why shouldn't I be in that business, why shouldn't I own a piece of that instead of just being a courier or something? On the other side, you have these remarkable young women who took over jobs as police officers when their four predecessors had been killed for it, or some of these

social activists in Juarez and Chihuahua who took on the army, the police, the government, demanding human rights, and all too often were killed for it. I have no way of accounting for that kind of courage, that kind of moral backbone. It's just amazing to me.

PLAYBOY: Let's rewind all the way to your beginnings. What role did books and storytelling play in your childhood?

WINSLOW: Immense. My old man was a sailor, one of the great raconteurs of all time. He'd have his Navy buddies over, and I'd literally get under the table. He'd pretend to think I'd gone to bed, and as long as I was quiet, he'd let me sit there, at the feet of these great storytellers, and listen. I could listen to those stories over and over and over again. My mom was a librarian and my dad a great reader, so we always had books in the house. We were allowed to read anything we wanted, at any age, and as long as we were reading there was no bedtime — they were perfectly happy for us to just pass out while reading. My older sister by two years [Kristine Rolofson] is also a novelist, very highly regarded. Two kids in the house, and they both become professional writers. So, yeah, an absolutely immense role.

PLAYBOY: What's your advice on how to write a good sex scene?

WINSLOW: Oh my God. [Laughs] I think that like any other action scene, a good sex scene reveals character and moves the story forward. And in the same way you handle action, or maybe even violence, you want it to have a physical feel. I want that reaction from the reader. So if I'm writing a gunfight, I want a fearful, suspenseful reaction, but if I'm writing a sex scene — or a love scene, if you will — I want to use words and sounds that are sensual and sexy. To be perfectly honest with you, I work pretty hard at it. An action scene has a certain kind of rhythm to it, and a sex scene has a certain kind of rhythm to it, and they're hopefully quite different. Not always, but usually. You want softer, longer sounds, softer consonants, as opposed to plosive consonants, longer vowels, that kind of thing. That's what I work for.

PLAYBOY: What projects are on your plate right now?

WINSLOW: Right now I'm doing nothing but touring with Cartel, but you know I've snuck in half a short story here and there. I have a couple of fiction books in the works, neither of them about drugs. And I will say this, I don't think I've written my best book yet. I think that's in my future. I think I still have a lot to learn and a lot to achieve. I think I can do a lot more with words and a lot more with style and am looking forward to doing that. I don't know if I could get up in the morning if I didn't think that.





TURNING DREAMS INTO REALITY

THIS MONTH WE'RE CHILLING WITH THE BEAUTIFUL
AND MULTI-TALENTED HAIRDRESSER, STYLIST, AND
CO-OWNER OF BUSH2BEACH

Charlee Wilkinson

Instagram [@charlee___wilkinson](#)

MUA Kathryn Kawasaki | [@kathrynmua](#)





Heya Charlee, happy to have you. Could we start by you telling us a little bit about yourself, where you're from, and what got you started on your journey into modeling? Thank you it's a pleasure! A little about me, I'm a qualified hairdresser of almost 10 years. Hair and beauty are one of my biggest passions that I will always be expanding my knowledge and skills in. My partner and I have recently started a bathroom renovations business and when the opportunity arises to expand more into modeling, I seize the experience. The Goldcoast is my home city and where I have always lived. My modeling journey started last year and has always been something I've been encouraged to do by many and is now an industry that I am blessed to work in when given the chance to.

When you're not on a shoot or working hard on running your business, what are some of the things you love doing for fun or to relax? I'm lucky enough to live in one of the most beautiful places in the world, the Goldcoast, and for fun, I love experiencing everything it has to offer! Beach walks, picnics in the mountains, exploring the rainforests, or just finding a nice local café to have lunch with my friends is how I spend my weekends.

Do you have any role models in the industry, or are there any people you'd absolutely love to work with and why? My ultimate girl crush is Margot Robbie. I think she is an incredibly talented woman and would absolutely love to work with her. Kendell Jenner is also an inspiration for many aspiring models. She has excelled in her career, and I think she would also be incredible to work with.

We know this isn't your first rodeo in terms of photoshoots, could you tell us more about some of the work you've done and what were some of your most memorable moments? Absolutely, last year I was on the cover of Maxim Australia, and I was completely in my element on shoot day. I'm a firm believer in doing things in life that make you happy and if you love what you do it shows. The entire experience was memorable for me, but just having fun with the photographer (Rocky Batchelor) and seeing the incredible images we could create together is a part of the experience I won't forget.

What advice do you have for all those aspiring young models hoping to break into the industry? I would say don't be afraid, follow your passion and give it your all.

You're beautiful and business-minded, what got you started on your career path, and could you tell us about Bush2Beach and some of the awesome work you've done? Thank you. I've always enjoyed the freedom of working for myself, not everyone wants the stress of owning and running a business, but I like to do things my own way and I believe it comes naturally to me. Hairdressing is a career and passion of mine that started from a young age that I will be focussing more on in the next 6 months to come. Bush2beach you can follow our Instagram page @bush2beachbathrooms to see some of our incredible bathroom work. My partner found his niche in the construction industry and when he asked me to help with Bush2beach, I put all my time and energy into doing my part. I just so happened to

love it as much as him along the way.

Hypothetical question. If you a great idea or product but needed an investor, would you consider pitching your idea on Shark Tank, or are you all about making your own path? Without hesitation, I'd say I would find my own path. I'd explore investors through my own business relationships first.

Are you currently working on any new business ventures or modeling projects, and could you tell us more about it? I'm looking at starting my own business within the next 6 months by opening a small salon starting with myself and within a five-year plan, if growth allows it, expanding with staff. I have also been exploring the idea of enlarging my social media following and if I decide to do this, more modeling will be a part of that as well.

Do you have a celebrity crush, and what do you look for in your ideal partner? My celebrity crush is Tom Hardy. My ideal partner would be a rugged manly man that is chivalrous and knows how to be romantic. He loves new experiences and isn't afraid to get his hands dirty.

Mixing business with pleasure, do you think lovers can go into business together? I think definitely they can. For example, the last nine months I've worked day and night alongside my partner. I believe they must be the right person and if they are it's more than possible, you can be a real power couple.

In the current world of social distancing and online dating, would you say chivalry is dead? From what I see today, chivalry isn't dead but rare. I think men undervalue how important it is and sometimes women don't appreciate it enough when they are lucky enough to have it.

What's your idea of an ideal date, and does money make the moment, or is it the thought that counts? Money is by no means a factor for me when it comes to the perfect date. Effort and planning are most important. My most memorable date was on a beach, with a bottle of wine, a cheese platter, and Ed Sheeran playing on his phone.

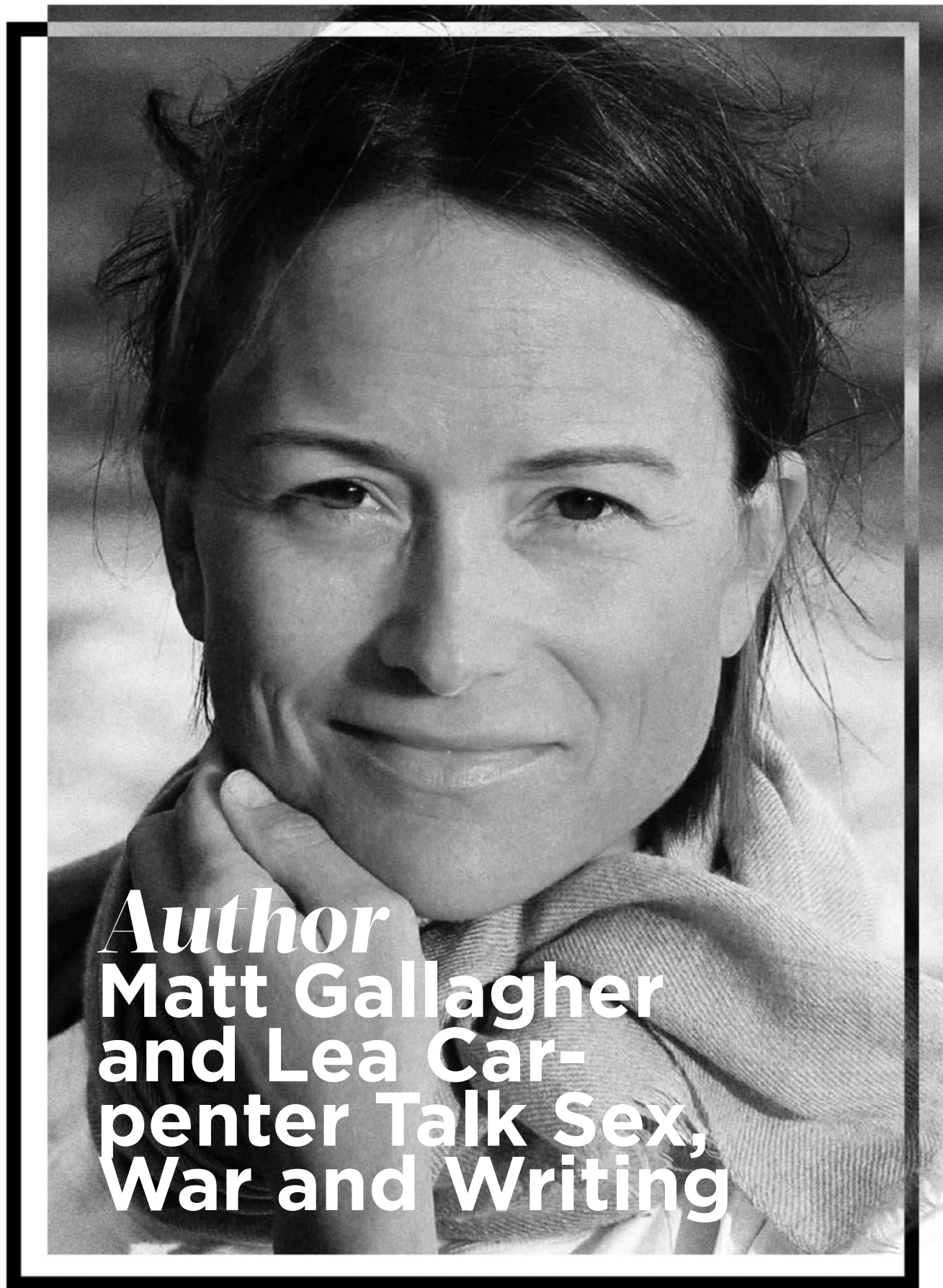
We noticed your Instagram is private and we respect that. For all the guys out there who would like to stay up to date on your news and events, where can they do that? I've always been a private person but keep an eye out on my Instagram @charlee__wilkinson as I do plan on sharing more here.

If you had any last parting words of wisdom and advice to our readers out there, what would they be? Fill your life with experiences, don't look back, and regret the chances you didn't take.

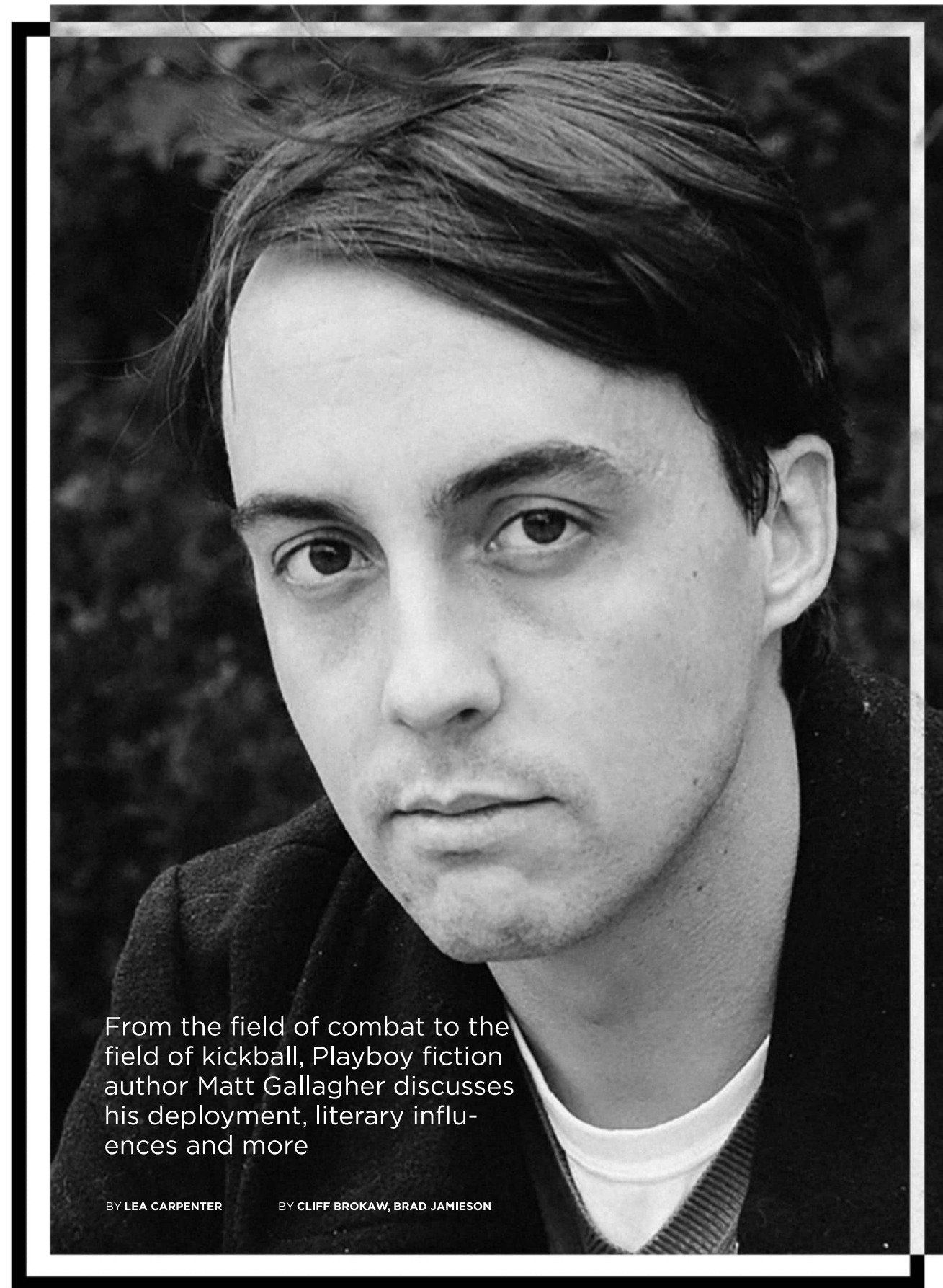
Thank you so much, Charlee, for taking the time out of your busy schedule to sit with us. We hope to see you again soon and wish you all the best going forward - with love XoXo... Thank you for having me! It's been an absolute pleasure. Speak soon.







Author
**Matt Gallagher
and Lea Car-
penter Talk Sex,
War and Writing**



From the field of combat to the field of kickball, Playboy fiction author Matt Gallagher discusses his deployment, literary influences and more

BY LEA CARPENTER

BY CLIFF BROKAW, BRAD JAMIESON

“*Breathing life into characters and stories at the expense of oneself is central to the author’s purpose, I think.*”

praised his work. New York Times critic Michiko Kakutani called *Youngblood* “an urgent and deeply moving novel.”

These days, Gallagher spends his mornings writing and, after lunch and a trip to the dog park, his afternoons revising. We talked about everything from kickball and character development to conflict literature and counter-insurgency.

PLAYBOY: Tell me about the inspiration for your extraordinary story, *Babylon*.

GALLAGHER: Thank you, I’m glad you liked the story. *Babylon* has a few different origins. For one, my wife and I played in a Brooklyn kickball league a couple of years ago with friends, and while we had fun, the absurdity of it all couldn’t be ignored. The environment seemed ripe for literary exploration—not just the silliness and the overgrown childishness, but the moments of earnestness and kindness, even generosity. I’d also been reading more

about the homecoming experiences of women veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of it felt familiar to my own return home and those of my soldiers, but much of it felt completely foreign. The idea that some veterans of these wars felt the need to hide away that part of themselves from society and from their families, just because of their gender—that bothered me. And when something bothers me, I tend to start writing to figure out why.

PLAYBOY: When writing *Babylon*, was it harder for you to channel the mind of a Marine who is a lesbian or a Brooklyn hipster—or does it even matter, as fiction is essentially the channeling of voices?

GALLAGHER: Well, I was an Army Cavalry officer, and the Cav can be somewhat more ... unconventional than the Marine Corps. But *Babylon*, which is set around a hipster Brooklyn kickball league and about the particularities of a changing first-world ecosystem, didn’t need any more unconventionality. It needed some rigidity. It needed some yuts and oo-rahs and Marine-style pride.

So while it’s true that I’ve never been a woman nor have I been a Marine, I have known loneliness. I have longed for the past, at least a past distilled in memory. I have witnessed the pitfalls of gentrification, and its benefits. Getting to know Marti, and the other characters of *Babylon*, proved a true joy as I wrote and rewrote the story. Breathing life into characters and stories at the expense of oneself is central to the author’s purpose, I think.

PLAYBOY: Is there a new literature emerging from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? If so, what defines it?

GALLAGHER: It certainly feels like we’re in the midst of something. Whether it ends up being anything of significance or meaning will be up to the works involved and their quality. As for unique traits in this growing canon, I’ve noticed two: an interest in the perspective of the “other,” be they enemy combatants, local civilians or interpreters; and a keen interest in America’s all-volunteer force—what its effects are on the individuals who make up this force, and what the effects will be for our country as a whole.

PLAYBOY: Once you’ve written about war, is it hard to write about other more mundane things?

GALLAGHER: When I was in my 20s, I thought so. Now I’ve grown to more appreciate the mundane, both in writing and in life. War writing is like any sort of writing. It can be good, it can be mediocre, it can be bad. It’s the work that separates, not the subject.

PLAYBOY: Our friend Phil Klay (author of the National Book Award-winning collection *Redeployment*) said, “War is too strange to be processed alone.” Is this part of what inspired the creation of *Words After War*, the nonprofit you now help run?

GALLAGHER: Absolutely. Teaching writing for *Words After War* has continually fulfilled and inspired me. The organization is devoted to bringing veterans and civilians together to discuss and critique conflict literature. It bridges the vast, ethereal military-civilian divide every day, in tangible, meaningful ways. Some of the writing that has emerged from its workshops is just stunning.

PLAYBOY: Why did you choose *Youngblood* as the title for your new novel?

GALLAGHER: It’s a slang term used in the military, particularly in the combat arms branches, referring to new, untested soldiers. Experienced sergeants say it with that strange blend of derision and compassion. In the novel, I believe it refers to a multitude of characters, American soldiers and local Iraqis. All of them are trying to find their way through the ruin, trying to figure out the least worst choice in a land of only awful choices. After nine years of war and occupation in Iraq, that hope is all that remains.

PLAYBOY: What was the origin of your war blog?

GALLAGHER: Oh, the blog. Seems like forever ago. In 2007, as my scout platoon and I prepared to deploy to Iraq as part of the 25th Infantry Division, I began researching online for what awaited us. I came across a variety of military blogs that explained very clearly and cleanly what counterinsurgency looked like for soldiers on the ground. It also stoked a fire in me. I’d grown up reading and writing as a way of making sense of the world, and I thought, Hey, I could do this too. So I did, and called it *Kaboom* as a sort of stupid, immature joke about the threat of roadside bombs. What can I say? I was 24 and directly reckoning with my mortality for the first time.

PLAYBOY: How did how you were raised prepare you for what you saw in Iraq?

GALLAGHER: I grew up in the suburbs, the son of

“*Putting ideals into practice is hard and messy. It’s also what we all have to do in life if we are ever to become the person we aspire to be.*”

two lawyers. So nothing in my background could’ve prepared me for the type of third-world poverty I saw there. But I was raised a Presbyterian, and thus raised to respectfully question prevailing wisdom. Putting ideals into practice is hard and messy. It’s also what we all have to do in life if we are ever to become the person we aspire to be.

PLAYBOY: During your deployment, what was the most emotional experience you had?

GALLAGHER: The moments I return to the most are the personal encounters with the local children. Especially the orphans.

PLAYBOY: How was your transition back to civilian life?

GALLAGHER: About as ideal as anyone could hope for, though of course it still had its strange moments. Once, shortly after I came home and moved to New York, I got off the subway in a not-nice part of Brooklyn while a gang fight was going on down the block. A couple pistol shots went off. People began running every which way while I took a knee behind a car and looked around for my radioman. I felt really dumb when I realized where I was (and where I wasn’t), though when I got a confused look from an old man hobbling across the street, I thought, I found cover, dude. You’re in the middle of the street. You’re the crazy one.

PLAYBOY: How did you meet your wife, Annie, and what was it like navigating a relationship while you were on deployment?

GALLAGHER: We went to high school together. But we didn’t start dating until some years later, when she was in college and I’d graduated and joined the Army. Our relationship during that time was like a lot of long-distance ones. We kept in touch over phone and e-mail. We tried to share as much of our respective lives with one another while still living our own. These wars allowed for that communication in a way that previous ones didn’t. I don’t know. Maybe it worked because we didn’t put great long-term expectations on it until we had the luxury and space to.

PLAYBOY: Which authors were critical as you developed your own voice as a writer?

GALLAGHER: Katherine Anne Porter, Maya Angelou, Ernest Hemingway, Ralph Ellison and Stephen Crane, for five. All Americans, all deceased. Not sure if that’s a coinci-

dence or not.

PLAYBOY: What are your thoughts on writing about sex and desire, two subjects famously hard to put into words? I love the scene in Joan Didion's *Democracy*—a novel about a war that's not exactly a war novel—where Jack watches Inez walk off plane in the pouring rain. Didion simply has him say, "Get her out of the goddamn rain." That scene delivers desire without being explicit. No one is naked; they are not even in the same room.

GALLAGHER: That scene is superb, as is that novel. Good literature aspires to reveal the many layers of the human condition; how can that not include sex and desire? The latter serves as a driving force for Marti and her cousin Squatch in *Babylon*, and for a variety of characters in *Youngblood*, *American* and *Iraqi*. I'm not just talking about Marti's trips to Mama's Lounge, either, or the thrill foreign soldiers feel in their chests when they catch a glimpse of the sheik's mysterious daughter. What happens when what we seek comes into the scope of another? What happens when that pursuit conflicts with the search of another, or perhaps worse, proves to be the very same thing as theirs? Desire can give purpose to existence. It can also inhibit and destroy. Literature has brooded over these fates since the beginning.

PLAYBOY: James Salter or Michael Herr?

GALLAGHER: Both are masters, of course, but so different. Salter's craft was all sculpture, each sentence and idea so polished and clean. Herr's work captures something else, something more raw and visceral, even if it sometimes came out messy. So gun to my head, I'd say Herr. I like a bit of chaos in art.

PLAYBOY: Stanley McChrystal or David Petraeus?

GALLAGHER: Another tough one, but I'll have to go with Petraeus. I spent 15 formative months as a COIN [counterinsurgency] disciple in the Iraqi desert, and Petraeus was the COIN prophet.

For those unfamiliar, COIN in Iraq represented a shift in strategy and approach. It happened as part of the Surge and the Sunni Awakening in 2007 or so, and came with the realization that we weren't going to be able to shoot our way out of the war. The most vivid description of COIN I ever got as a young lieutenant was "You know, like British imperial occupation." That's not totally exact, but it isn't wrong either. It's about the long game, being a jack-of-all-trades immersed with the people, being beat cops and conducting electricity sur-

"The public's fascination with Navy SEALs, Army Rangers and whatever goofy acronym Delta Force goes by now is both understandable and alarming."

veys and dealing with roadside bombs and snipers all at the same time.

It worked in Iraq, at least temporarily. We thought we'd won the war when we came home in 2009, if wars like Iraq can be won. But that peace couldn't be sustained, which is tragic for a lot of reasons. Foremost for the Iraqi people.

PLAYBOY: Army or Marines?

GALLAGHER: Well of course I'm going to say Army, but my grandfather was a career Naval officer, so I have great respect for our sailors and what they do. Even if that crack-jack uniform belongs in the pajamas aisle. The old notion is that the Army's culture is more egalitarian, and perhaps that's still true.

PLAYBOY: Why does America adore and glamorize special operations?

GALLAGHER: I'll say this: Both the Army and the Marines are so much more than the special operations within them. The public's fascination with Navy SEALs, Army Rangers and whatever goofy acronym Delta Force goes by now is both understandable and alarming. The idea of the mysterious supersoldier rappelling from the sky like a shadow ninja to save the day can be comforting. It's also not representative of who makes up the armed forces or what the armed forces do as a whole in our collective name.

PLAYBOY: What are you working on now?

GALLAGHER: A second novel, centered on post-empire America. Vague, I know! It still needs a lot of work, but I'm excited for its potential.

Lea Carpenter's first novel, Eleven Days (Knopf, 2013), was short-listed for the Center for Fiction prize and long-listed for the Baileys. Her second novel, set in the intelligence world, is forthcoming from Knopf.



ENTERTAINMENT FOR MEN

MARCH 1968 • 75 CENTS

PLAYBOY

Behind the Cover: March 1968

A look inside
PLAYBOY's March
1968 issue

WRITTEN BY LIZ SUMAN

PHOTOS BY DAVID CHAN & BILL ARSENAULT

In March 1968, American airwaves broadcast the final episodes of The Lucy Show, Batman and The Monkees, the UCLA Bruins—led by junior center Kareem Abdul-Jabbar—set an NCAA Tournament record when they triumphed over the University of North Carolina Tar Heels and revolutionary civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. was planning the Poor People’s Campaign exactly one month before he was assassinated.

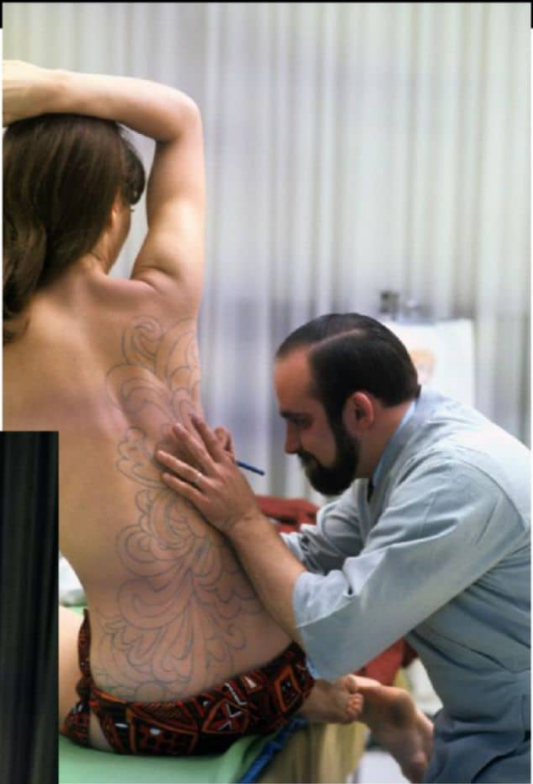
Although the societal backdrop was bitter-sweet, that month’s issue of PLAYBOY offered plenty of bright spots. Between the covers of our March 1968 edition, readers discovered a wildly imaginative body paint-themed pictorial (before tattoos were de rigueur), a fascinating Playboy Interview with literary bon vivant Truman Capote and a sartorial soliloquy on the season’s most covetable rainwear.

Read on to enjoy a visual tour of some of our favorite March moments, including some of the issue’s greatest hits, as well as unpublished outtakes that didn’t make it to the printer in 1968.

Behind the Cover



Previously unpublished outtakes from the March 1968 cover



Previously unpublished behind-the-scenes images from the issue's cover shoot.

Cover model Sharon Kristie appeared on multiple PLAYBOY covers, but her 1968 collaboration with Mario Casilli, the long-time staff photographer who painted the rainbow Rabbit Head on Kristie’s back, “colors our memory most vividly,” as PLAYBOY archivist Joey Coombe once artfully put it.

Spirit of the Sixties



BIRD WATCHER Nature lover by day, our chick is a night owl, too, and glad to have someone share her nest. But she decides Whoo.



PSYCHEDELIC HIPPIE When the ultimate hippie at far left does her thing, even the most literal-minded can grasp pop philosopher Marshall McLuhan's thought that the medium is the message



CAREER GIRL Our assistant account executive's form-fitting double-breasted jacket marks her as a winner in the fashion-conscious advertising game. But she's earned a reputation for stuffiness by breaking one of the game's rules: At freewheeling creative conferences, where shirt sleeves are de rigueur, she keeps her jacket on



TEACHER The painted pedagogue above, though obviously with it, put down the joker who chalked "sex now" on her free-form blackboard.



SUN WORSHIPPER Beaches are best enjoyed when one's bare, of course, but some sort of covering is still required on the more populated stretches of the nation's shore lines. Our avant-garde beachnik's ultimate barekini at right solves this dilemma, granting freedom and placating prudery at the same time. The outfit's most fun when it's noncolorfast.



MUSICIAN Our cellist's bare Bach variation draws a bravo—especially for her use of a spirited spinal chord.



HITCHHIKER Insurance against being stranded in Kansas, according to this migratory bird, is the topographical map she calls "San Francisco, here I come."



FINANCIAL WHIZ The inflated aspects of our fiscal miss' economic picture make the threat of a shrinking dollar good news for lovers of legally tender species.



JESSICA ROSE & LORNA STERGIO

Instagram @its.jessicarosee

Instagram @shotsbylorna

Photography by Katie Nelson | @playmatevikingqueen_katie





Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! Talk to us about your career and what made you get into the industry?

J: Thank you! So, getting into modeling was an accident! I did 1 photoshoot just for fun and it snowballed into what it is today. I had never thought about being in front of the camera before that. But I truly enjoy it.

L: Firstly, let me say thank you! I'm grateful and honored to have this opportunity. After the military, I was lost with what I wanted to be my next career. Modeling was something I had stumbled upon, and as it progressed, I started taking it more seriously.

What is at the top if your list to achieve the most this year?

J: I'm working on so many things right now. My biggest goal at the moment is to launch my company before year's end. I've been working diligently to get all the moving pieces working together smoothly and I'm almost there. This is something that is very close to my heart, And I couldn't be more excited.

L: Career-wise, I would like to move my coaching business from an idea to fruition. As a personal goal, I'd love to obtain a skydiving license because I am such an adrenaline junkie.

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman?

J: I'm not sure I give much thought about how I'm seen by other people. My drive is for myself and my family. In my mind, ambition is a form of self-love. We are meant to grow and flourish into whatever fulfillment we need for our lives. You cannot accomplish that by Merely thinking of it, you have to put in the work. You have to love yourself enough not to settle, love yourself enough to get what you want.

L: I feel it's important to retain these attributes. Beauty can be fleeting, but strength, intelligence, and ambition can always be harnessed no matter what stage a woman is in their life. A woman

who acquires these qualities shows me that she possesses a sense of resilience and tenacity towards life, and those attributes are priceless and beautiful to me.

What would you say makes you stand out in the industry?

J: I believe it's my attitude towards other people. This industry is cutthroat, catty, and dishonest. But it doesn't have to be, I believe if enough of us want a change, it can happen. We were taught as children about the Golden Rule, and I really believe in it.

L: I follow my intuition. Everyone is trying to fit a certain mold or standard. How am I supposed to stand out if I conform to what everyone else is doing? I started flourishing once I realized how unique I was, and this realization helped me harness my worth and unlock my potential.

Where do you draw most of your strength from as a professional, career woman?

J: My strength comes from my family. They are there when I need words of encouragement, a hug, or a laugh. They are the reason I am so focused on the future. I want to build an empire to leave my child and I couldn't do it without their support.

L: My mother has always been the driving force behind my work ethic. I have never seen someone work so hard and defy the norms of what women can and can't do.

What are some of your biggest passions?

J: Travel!! I absolutely cannot get enough of it. I love the people, the culture, buildings, foods, scenery, and the different experiences you have with each new place. Travel is my one true love.

L: I love traveling to different countries and exploring different cultures. I also enjoy reading and learning new things/concepts. Additionally, it goes without saying, I am a huge animal lover and advocate.

3 ultimate deal-breakers when it comes to men?

J: Entitlement, no ambition, and carelessness. Those are the most unattractive, horrible traits in any person. And I want nothing to do with it.

L: The ultimate deal breakers for me are men who have bad hygiene, are crass, and discriminatory.

What are some of the things that attract you to a man?

J: Confidence, warmth, and happiness. Definitely some of the most attractive qualities.

L: Nothing turns me on more than a man who has high emotional intelligence, is loyal, and is dedicated to their goals and dreams.

Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?

J: Semi-retired, traveling the world. I have deadlines and milestones that I've set in place for myself and I'm doing great keeping pace.

L: Great question, I hope to see myself sharing my life with someone special who I can travel and go on adventures with. I'd also love to see my business flourishing and thriving.

What is the wrong way to approach you as an admirer?

J: Being aggressive. Realize that I too am just a person. Approach me as you would anyone else.

L: I'd like to believe I am a pretty open and approachable person, unless you approach me in a rude or crude manner.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? I love Tiktok! You can find me @its.jessicarose and I am also on Instagram @its.jessicarose.

We are so happy to have gotten to know you a little bit! Any last words out there for our readers? Be kind, love everyone, and don't settle!







The Dark, Hilarious and Brutally Honest

‘Emotional Sci-Fi’
of Writer A.M. Homes

The award-winning author
talks dark humor and human-
ity and what it’s like to revisit
beloved characters

BY JULIE BUNTIN

PHOTO BY PETER ASH LEE

Imagine the worst disaster that could strike your family. Now multiply that by five, and you're still barely in the ballpark of the chaos that Cheryl, the protagonist of A.M. Homes's *She Got Away*, stumbles into when she returns home from college after an ominous phone call from her anorexic sister, Abigail.

The story is set in Los Angeles, a world that at first seems familiar—casually expensive, the heat “like a physical lozenge, a sedative”—but becomes, through Homes's rendering, disarming, hilarious and very weird. The details are all dialed up—think realism after a couple of *Adderall*. There's a kinetic energy generated by the relationship between tone (startlingly deadpan) and subject (grief, trauma, loss). Something has gone terribly wrong, and things are only going to get worse—and yet, from the dialogue to the details, what it really makes you want to do is laugh, the way horrible news can sometimes inspire hysterics. It's a bit sinister how Homes implicates her readers with their own laughter. What does it mean to laugh at tragedy? Why is it sometimes a relief to laugh at the things that scare us the most? Homes's writing—from her controversial novel *The End of Alice*, starring an imprisoned child molester, to her most recent novel, *May We Be Forgiven*, which opens with a man imagining his brother and sister-in-law having sex—regularly tackles the darker side of the human psyche. More boldly, she renders these situations with punchy, nerve-jangling humor. The effect is transgressive, exhilarating and, in a way, a relief. Everything sucks; people are capable of great cruelty and shocking selfishness. You might as well laugh.

Homes, the author of nearly a dozen books, writes fiction and nonfiction, essays and reportage. She has received several awards, including the 2013 Women's Prize for Fiction, and fellowships from the Guggenheim, the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Public Library's Cullman Center. (Not to mention: She was a runner-up in *PLAYBOY*'s 1987 College Fiction Contest.) She has also taken her talents to the world of television as a writer-producer for the Showtime series *The L Word* and has developed pilots for several networks. We chatted via e-mail.

PLAYBOY: Where did your *PLAYBOY* story, *She Got Away*, come from? Are your stories motivated by a specific impulse?

HOMES: The only impulse that motivates me is trying to capture my characters wherever they are in their lives—as organically and honestly as possible. The hard work is knowing what lens to look through, what aspect

“

Humor is very important. I find everyday life difficult, painful, and by finding the absurdity in it, I'm able to go a little further.”

I'm interested in capturing and why. Grace Paley, my wonderful teacher, taught me to always aim to capture the truth according to the character, which was good advice. For the most part I don't write autobiographically, so I am always focused on what is the experience of this situation, this moment for each of my characters.

This story and the characters in it are part of a series of stories I've written about the same family. The first was “Chunky in Heat,” which appeared in *The Safety of Objects*, and then “Raft in Water Floating,” which was in *Things You Should Know*, and then “Hello Everybody,” published by *Electric Literature* and which, along with *She Got Away*, will be in my new collection, out next summer.

PLAYBOY: Your writing is often concerned with, as you put it in a profile in *The Guardian*, the things people “don't want to say out loud.” What are those things in *She Got Away*?

HOMES: It's been said that I write emotional science fiction—emotions pushed out to the next level. I think of it like a photograph that's supersaturated with color. And in terms of what's not said out loud, I'm interested in the space between our public and private selves, the subtle secrets we keep with regard to the dissonance between how we present ourselves and how we live. And often, I'm also writing about the dissonance within each of us, between who we are, who we aspire to be and how family history or



our fears can keep us from achieving our goals.

PLAYBOY: Some of the funniest moments in *She Got Away* come from the interaction between the bluntness of the tone and the magnificent tragedy of the events; Abigail's eating disorder, for example, is a source of several jokes in the piece (the foam restaurant, that she's literally two-dimensional). What drives you to write so irreverently about things that we generally find very serious? How conscious are you while writing of whether or not you're being funny?

HOMES: For me humor is very important. I find everyday life difficult, painful, and by finding the absurdity in it, the humor in it, I'm able to go a little further. Humor also allows us to talk about serious things. If you can make someone laugh, then you can also go down to the next level in terms of the psychological and the kinds of things that are difficult to talk about.

PLAYBOY: There's a great Donald Barthelme story, "The School," that reminded me a lot of *She Got Away*—both are organized around a kind of escalating pattern of deaths, each one more shocking and hilarious than the last. In plotting the story, did you see all these deaths coming? Did any of them surprise you?

HOMES: In terms of the deaths, it did surprise me. I've written about this family several times, and if you'd asked me years ago if this would happen, I'd have said no. But I'm also aware of how a family tragedy, such as the one this family went through years ago, takes its toll on everyone, the parents, the siblings. And I think for the main character, the larger question was about the safety of leaving home. What is lost when one grows up and leaves the nest? For Cheryl the literal question was: Would the nest survive? And if somehow the family didn't, would she?

PLAYBOY: I love how brazenly this piece challenges what the reader is willing to believe. Were you ever worried about pushing the reader too far?

HOMES: The core of the story is deeply honest and human, and the bells and whistles of their life in L.A. are just a reflection of the strangeness of the times we're living in—and their attempt to stay "real." Again, perhaps it goes back to that notion of emotional science fiction—which is perhaps illustrating the outside edges—or, as you say, pushing the reader a little bit. But if it's a push, it's a push into the heart of the story and the characters.

PLAYBOY: The story pokes fun at Los Angeles and some

of its clichés: Abigail and her mother both have "all the filler and Botox"; one of Cheryl's dad's movie-star clients visits him in the hospital to make sure he's not just avoiding him; there's a pervasive gloss of money over the domestic details. What makes L.A. an interesting setting, and why did you choose to root the piece there?

HOMES: I've written several stories and novels set in Los Angeles. I find it a fascinating place, where the "dream" in the classic American Dream way is very much still alive. People come to L.A. to make it—immigrants, aspiring actors, writers—and people reinvent themselves there. That's just part of the social fabric. I also find the racial/economic divides very interesting, as much about L.A. is based on where you live—how far you're literally willing to go for work, for dinner, etc. A while ago, when I was writing a nonfiction book, I described L.A. as the most American place in America, and I think that holds true. The obsession with celebrity, with pop culture, with the lives of the rich and famous is still a major draw—and yet real people live there and grow up there, which to me is what's super strange.

PLAYBOY: The characters in *She Got Away* talk past each other, in jokes and code. They often seem to be engaged in entirely separate conversations that occasionally intersect in hilarious ways, yet your dialogue masterfully spurs on the plot. Is there a secret to writing good dialogue?

HOMES: There is no secret. My training comes from having started first as a playwright. Edward Albee was one of my mentors, and there were other "invisible" mentors such as Harold Pinter and Sam Shepard.

PLAYBOY: What crime do you think you would most likely get away with? Or, if the answer to that is too revealing, have you ever stolen anything? If so, what?

HOMES: I once stole blue eye shadow; my mother made me return it. You'll notice I don't wear makeup.

TURN IT UP.

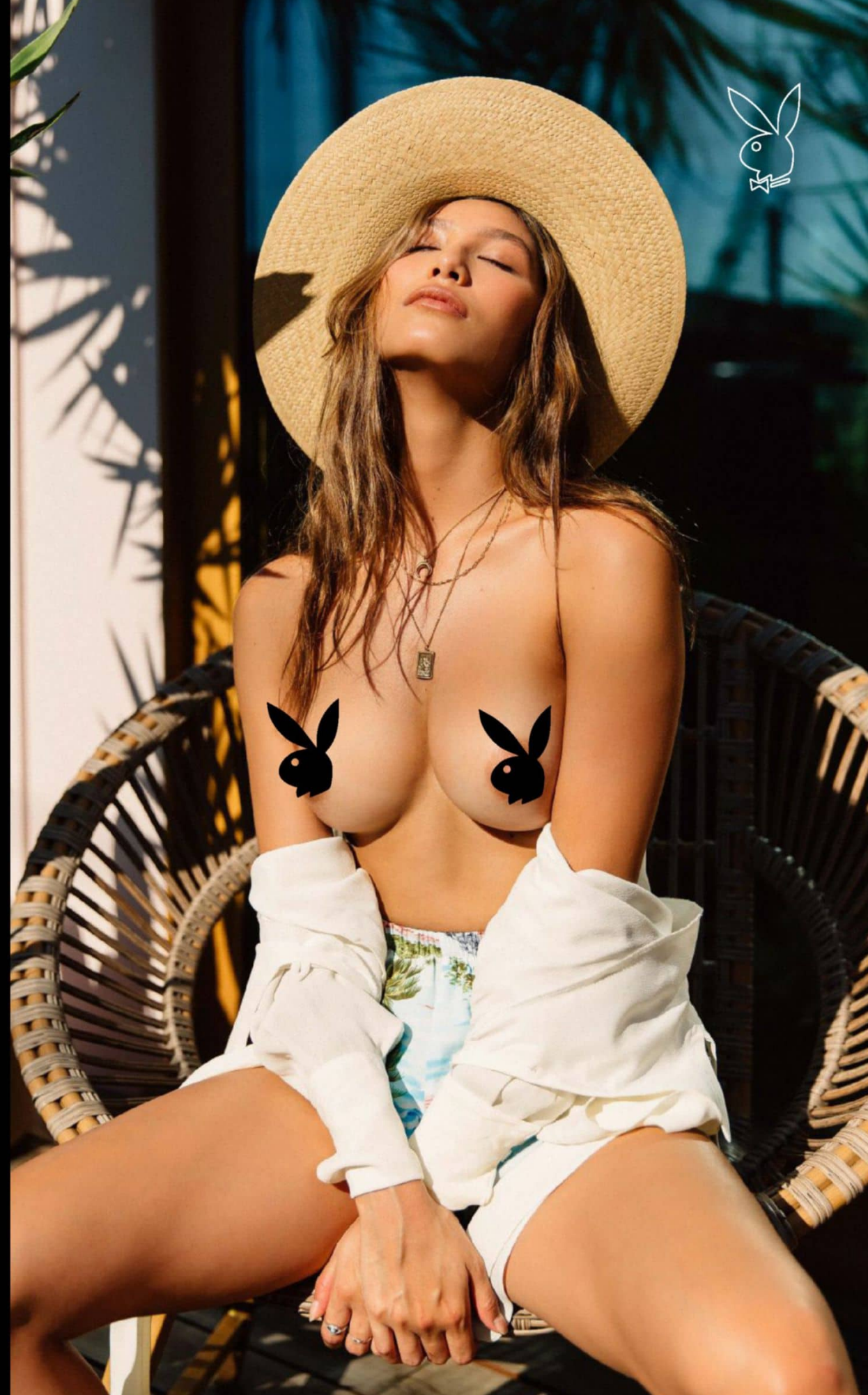
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